MRS. ALEMERE'S ELOPEMENT

CHARLES MARRIOTT

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BY

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LONDON

EVELEIGH NASH

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TO
CHARLES LEWIS HIND

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CHAPTER I

WHEN they reached the door of 29 Sidney Gardens, wearing such a discreet look of every day, both Umney and Sherring felt at the same moment that their quest was possibly a little foolish. Mrs. Feddon had sent for them directly she learned that her son had gone to London with Mrs. Alemere, and the influence of her personality upon them was so strong that her parting words, "I trust to your discretion, but bring Richard home with you," had an almost hypnotic effect. In their elation over tracking down the fugitives before six o'clock, they had not considered the difficulties which might lie in the way of executing Mrs. Feddon's commands, until this moment. During their three hours' journey from Draycote to Paddington they had occupied themselves with the character of the female fugitive. Both had old scores to pay off on Mrs. Alemere. It was Mrs. Alemere, for example, who said that Mr. Sherring's intellect was no excuse for his agnosticism because God was merciful; and that if looks

were anything Mr. Umney could not be described as a nonentity, thus touching each man's tenderest spot. Sherring, in his character of philosopher, could afford to be indifferent to his mouse-coloured hair, long upper lip and prominent teeth. Umney was compared by flatterers to a colonel of dragoons, and, so Mrs. Alemere said, his character only existed in his eyebrows and moustache, which were coal black. Sherring was a bachelor of means, and if you wished to win Umney's regard you were to believe him unhappily married.

Sherring, with an air of decision, rang the bell. The door was opened by a smart servant.

"A gentleman named Feddon staying here?" said Sherring, more as a statement than a question.

The girl invited them into the house.

"I'll tell missus," she said; "what names shall I say, please?"

"Never mind our names," answered Sherring sternly.

They went through a comfortable smell of cooking into the front room, where the table was laid for dinner. To them, "missus," who was tall, slender, and good-looking, with dark hair and thin lips prepared for any emergency.

"Yes?" she asked, with her round chin uplifted. To Umney it was evident that she was pleasantly excited, as if things were happening from which she derived an importance agreeable to her tastes, but Sherring only noticed and condemned her too smart gown and artificially refined manner.

"Has Mr. Feddon taken rooms here?" he asked abruptly.

She momentarily arranged her lips.

"Mr. Feddon has engaged rooms here for a lady," she replied, in the tone of one delivering a facer.

Sherring said that he wished to see Mr. Feddon, alone, without further delay. The woman bowed.

"My name is Mrs. Kemp. I'll see if Mr. Feddon is—at liberty," she said with a slight pause, hinting possible inconvenience. Sherring made an impatient gesture, but Umney restrained him with—

"She can have you turned out, you know."

Sherring grunted, thrust his hands into his pockets, and turned his back on Mrs. Kemp, who walked delicately out of the room.

"Well?" asked Umney. Sherring shrugged his shoulders. Umney flushed; he was the bigger man of the two.

"I say!" he said firmly, "what are you going to do now?"

"Make him come away with us," replied Sherring, with a return to his manner of airy cynicism. Umney gaped at him.

"But look here," he said, "what is the good—now?" Sherring smiled.

"My good Ass," he said, "Alemere ought to know by this time the sort of woman his wife is, and if he doesn't it's no affair of ours. All we've got to do is to swear Feddon didn't stop the night here—and prove it by making him spend it with us."

Umney looked as if for his part Mrs. Alemere

was welcome to her company, but said nothing. Mrs. Kemp was a long time upstairs, and they could hear voices and laughter. Sherring's face darkened.

"I'll make it hot for that woman," he said; "been a ladies'-maid I'll swear, and married the butler on the pickings of a *cause célèbre*. Look here, and here." He pointed from the excellent silver on the table to the liqueur-stand on the well-furnished sideboard. People who took boarders, he said, didn't do you like that by instinct. Go through Mrs. Kemp's silver and you'd find coronets. This harbouring was all in her trade: she might be "respectable" herself, probably was, that was the usefulness of her. She was one with the procuress, the masseuse, the manicurist—all the sly pretexts and filthy go-betweens of a rotten society. Umney listened abstractedly; he was thinking about more immediate problems.

"Supposing Feddon won't come home?" he said, as soon as he could get a word in.

"Oh, won't he," retorted Sherring.

They heard the door above them close, and the landlady descend the stairs humming a tune.

"Please be seated," she said with a hospitable gesture, "Mr. Feddon will be down directly."

"No, I'm damned!" said Sherring and—this, as Umney recognised, was his first grave error in tactics—made for the door. Mrs. Kemp smiled; possibly she had got her measure of the pursuers from upstairs.

"Come on, Umney!" called Sherring from the

passage. Umney avoided the woman's eye and followed. Mrs. Kemp sat down in an attitude of pleased expectancy.

As they ascended the second flight of stairs Sherring's pace grew slower, while he muttered remarks about the wages of sin as expressed in the luxurious carpet. When they reached the broad landing the door facing them opened suddenly, and a young man, stepping through, stood with his back to it. They heard the key turned on the inside.

The young man was tall, thin, and aquiline featured. His black hair was tossed back from his forehead, and he carried his firm chin well up. A discreet person would have considered the gleam in his hazel eyes half covered by thick white lids.

"Hullo, Sherring," he said carelessly.

Sherring waited until he had got his breath, and Umney ranged heavily alongside of him.

"You precious young idiot," began Sherring compassionately, "what have you got to say for yourself?"

"Come all the way from Draycote to ask me that, Sherring?" asked the young man pleasantly, as he stuck his hands in his pockets and leaned against the door-post. Umney marked that this was the first time young Feddon had ever addressed Sherring without "Mr." Decidedly young Feddon was growing up.

"Look here, Dick," said Sherring suavely, "this is no time for jokes."

"It isn't," agreed Feddon.

"So you're just coming back to Draycote with us, like a good fellow. There's no great harm done yet, and if you'll only be reasonable the thing will soon blow over."

"That all you've got to say?" asked Feddon, raising his eyebrows.

"I haven't begun yet," said Sherring, with a little unpleasant laugh, standing with his short legs wide apart and his ugly head thrust forward. Umney, who, perhaps because he had not so completely made up his mind, was the more observant of the two, noticed that Feddon was as dangerous as dynamite. He feared that Sherring was pot-valiant, and in spite of the rivalry of their methods would have warned him. This was a new and altogether unexpected Feddon.

"Of course," said Sherring, "I quite understand how you feel about it: you feel tremendously chivalrous and heroic, and all that. Flinging away the whole world for her sake."

"Shut up, Sherring," said Feddon quietly, and lowering his lids until only a thin bright line showed beneath them. Umney perspired and tried to think of a diversion. Sherring wanted tact; it was foolish to argue with Feddon; Sherring ought to have appealed to his filial sentiment, talked about his mother.

"You feel a damned fine fellow, don't you, Feddon?" Sherring went on; "but you've made the fatal mistake of supposing that you're acting on your own initiative. You're not, you know."

"Shut up, Sherring," said Feddon, still quietly.

"Your mother—" interpolated Umney in a half-whisper of despair. But the unfortunate Sherring was now beyond taking heed of either warning or suggestion.

"You are being led by the nose by a designing woman—" He got no further, for Feddon, stepping lightly forward, struck him full on the mouth. Sherring went down on the back of his head with a resounding bump, his short legs kicking up ridiculously. A few minutes earlier he had denounced the thick pile of the carpet.

Umney, with an exclamation of horror, went to his friend's assistance, but Sherring, sitting up and rubbing the back of his head, refused his hand. There was a smothered "Oh!" from behind the door. Feddon stuck his hands in his pockets again and regarded the pair with a broad grin.

Sherring got upon his feet and wiped his lips.

"All right," he said viciously, "you've done for yourself now! I promised your mother I'd bring you home, but of course I wash my hands of you after this. Don't say I didn't warn you. Come along, Umney."

They descended the stairs. When they reached the foot the landlady came out of the dining-room. She was breathing quickly, but seemed less angry than excited and anxious to get rid of them.

"Nice goings on in a respectable house," she said.

"Respectable, good Lord!" said Sherring, stopping to feel a front tooth.

"You'd better be careful what you're saying," murmured Mrs. Kemp. "Here's your hat."

"Good-bye, Sherring," called Feddon from the head of the stairs. "Sorry to have hurt you, but you wouldn't be warned."

Sherring grunted, and turned his back on him. The landlady held open the front door. Umney felt that this was his moment, and he went back to the foot of the stairs.

"Dick," he said, in his most emotional accents, "you've broken your mother's heart."

Once more on the doorstep, Umney proposed that they should spend the night at a private hotel in the Gloucester Road.

"I always stop there when I come up to town alone. The people know me," he said, with the air of one who had his fling occasionally. Sherring shrugged his shoulders, but agreed. Umney called a passing hansom, and they drove in silence to the hotel. They dined gloomily in a room which smelt of escaping gas. Not for some time would Sherring even speak of Feddon, but relieved his mind in criticisms of Umney's hotel.

"The sort of place where you would generally put up, Umney," he said, "with your absurd idea of economy. It isn't that you're not self-indulgent, but you're not intelligently so. I'm not extravagant myself, but I'm sane; I give the same amount of thought and consideration to my

comforts and pleasures that I do to more serious matters—if there are any. Half the misery in life is caused by hugger-mugger ways of doing things, and cowardice in facing facts. There's that young fool Feddon, for example. If Mrs. Alemere is the sort of thing he likes, there was no need to run away with her. I'm no moralist, as you know, but I hate violence and clumsiness."

"There'll be an awful scandal," said Umney, shaking his head.

"Of course there will," said Sherring, with gloomy satisfaction. "Alemere will jump at his opportunity. I expect he's been looking out for it for a long time."

As Mrs. Feddon's lawyer, Umney had an uncomfortable memory of her last words about discretion, but immediately consoled himself with the thought that she ought to have left him to manage the business alone. So far as he could see it had been a Sherring day, and he could not help thinking that they had gained nothing by being five-and-twenty minutes too early for their train at Draycote station, where Sherring made such exemplary use of his leisure, by cross-examining porters, that probably by this time all Draycote knew the purpose of their journey.

They sat over hot whisky-and-water until Sherring looked at the clock and yawned.

"Well, Umney," he said, fingering his glass, "we've all been young once, and, as I said, I'm no moralist, and seeing the disillusion that waits

for young Feddon I'm inclined to forgive him my face and drink to his joy of her."

He quoted a verse of *Omar Khayyám*. But Umney shook his head.

"Now, that's just where your theories break down, Sherring," he said. "You can't account for idealism and so you deny its existence. I'm not sticking up for young Feddon, but I'll lay you three to one in sovereigns that he spends to-night in the street looking up at her window."

"Then he'll have to spend it in the mews," said Sherring, with a laugh, "because the front room's the drawing-room. See how that one little fact knocks the romance out of it at once? But that's like you sentimentalists, you won't face facts. However, since there's no chance of proving Feddon's virtue unless we keep watch, which I for one decline to do, I shan't rob you of your money, my boy."

CHAPTER II

Evelyn Alemere unlocked the door with the swift noiselessness of the born intriguer.

"Oh, Dick," she said, all in a soft flutter, "what has happened?"

She looked more frightened than the situation required, since it might have been supposed that she had already burnt her boats.

"It's all right, dear," he said, taking her by both hands and leading her to a chair. But she would not sit down.

"I am so terribly frightened and upset," she whispered, beginning to cry.

His hands dropped to his sides, and he looked at her for a moment without speaking; then, "You are sorry?" he asked, not bitterly, but smiling sadly.

"Oh no, no!" she said; "I'm glad and proud:" continuing in an altered tone, "But, Dick, have they found out?"

He nodded, his eyes gleaming with amusement.

"Who?" she asked eagerly.

"Apparently all Draycote," he answered; adding quickly, "Not through my mother. I'm sure of that."

"But who came?" she persisted.

"Umney and Sherring," he said, his lips and

eyebrows pointing for her the flouted Propriety, their natural enemy, as it were, the two men stood for. She coloured separately with each name. Obviously she failed to share Feddon's appreciation of the humour of the encounter, and she murmured, "What will they think of me?"

"Umney will probably envy me," he said, looking at her mischievously, "and Sherring will think all the thoughts of which his dirty little mind is capable." Unconsciously he glanced down at his knuckles, which were bleeding.

"Oh, your poor, poor hand!" she cried, catching at it. He slipped his hand away and hid it behind his back.

"First blow for you, dear," he said lightly.

"Then was that the noise I heard?" she asked, her breath coming faster.

"That was Sherring," he answered, with a laugh.

"But why?"

"Used your name lightly, dear—but do sit down, you look half fainting."

He gently forced her into the arm-chair, and stood looking down at her with wistful anxiety. She still wore her outdoor things, even to her gloves, with her veil merely pushed up; she looked, indeed, less like ending than beginning a journey. She did not surrender to the chair, but sat with her hands on the arms of it, bending a little forward. The extraordinary sensibility of her face was heightened by her look of uneasy expectation. Her big brown eyes, so dark by this light that there was but little distinction between iris and pupil, looked curiously

animal, like the eyes of a frightened fawn; and her lips, pale crimson threads against the whiteness of her face, were slightly parted and quivered at intervals. She looked as if at any moment she might spring from the chair and run out of the room. Yet one would have guessed that her expression and attitude were foreign to her, as if she were generally not only mistress of herself but, by some power beyond her beauty,—from her flexible mouth and pointed, slightly prominent chin, a witty tongue was likeliest,—was capable of keeping other persons, at all events male persons, in subjection.

Her unaccustomed agitation made her all the more adorable to Feddon, whose mood at that moment was entirely protective. She was, he thought, like some warm soft bird that had fluttered into his hands for safety. He was altogether glad that Umney and Sherring had followed them; that heightened the romance of the situation, and he was young enough to derive a separate pleasure from the idea of outraged respectability. By and by he tried to soothe her by saying that it was better to have the hue-and-cry started at once. "After Umney and Sherring," he said, "there's nothing more to be afraid of—they're fairly representative of the two affronted powers." She listened abstractedly, merely saying, "Yes, I suppose you're right." He began to be a little puzzled by her manner; it struck him that her distress was not quite that proper to the occasion. She did not look as if she regretted the step she had taken, but as if she were

still planning out something and something in which he was not involved. This touched his pride, though it did not lessen his tenderness.

"Evelyn," he said, blushing slightly at the dear unfamiliarity of her name spoken aloud by his own lips, "don't you quite trust me?"

"Yes, of course I trust you, Dick," she said, with the least touch of impatience, as if that were not the problem, "only—Dick, I wish I hadn't written that letter."

"But why not?" he asked.

"Well, don't you see that it makes things look so premeditated—so calculated?" she replied. "I can't help feeling that it would have been better, after all, if I had come away alone."

"Oh no," he said in a tone of intense disappointment, "that would have spoilt everything. The only thing I'm sorry for is that you didn't let me write instead of you. That's what I ought to have done."

"But, my dear boy," she said, opening her eyes a little wider and looking up at him, "you couldn't have done that. He wouldn't have understood. Of course he had to know, and it was better that he should know at once, but I wish it could have been managed without dragging your name into it. . . . And I don't see why he need have told anybody." The petulance of her tone in the concluding sentence suggested that "he" had played an unfair stroke which disconcerted her plans.

"But, Evelyn," said Feddon, "you promised that whenever things got too hard you would ask me to

help you;—and you did mean this to be final, didn't you?" he asked anxiously.

"Oh, of course," she said, with slight over-emphasis, "I couldn't have lived with him after last night."

Feddon went on his knees beside her, and took her small gloved hands in one of his own.

"Dearest," he said, "don't worry now. Don't spoil this evening. Leave everything to me—you make me feel that you don't quite believe in my strength. We've cut the knot, and I'll manage everything. . . . Evelyn," he continued in a tone of suppressed passion, "you don't really regret that I came with you? Say that you're glad to have me, and that you do care for me a little."

"You dear boy, of course I do," she said, "or I couldn't have asked you to help me." She released one hand and played with his thick black hair, stroking it mechanically as she gazed out over his head with troubled eyes. The boy, turning back the glove on her other hand, reverently kissed her slim, cool wrist, got up and walked about the room.

"For me it's all like a beautiful dream," he said excitedly. "I've so often thought about an evening like this, but hardly dared hope it would ever come true. Think of it! Just we two—alone in London."

She burst into tears. He hurried to her side.

"Oh, don't," he said, in a tone of agony. "What is it? Tell me? Haven't I done right? I'm so clumsy and stupid—I've hurt you in some way. Ought I to have left you? It was selfish of

me to stop—but you know how hard it would have been for me to go away at once. I'll go now, dear, and come back in the morning."

"No, don't go just yet," she said, biting her trembling underlip, "it isn't that at all, but it makes me so miserable to think of all this may mean to you."

He flung back his head and laughed with relief.

"You dear, unselfish thing!" he cried; "but how can it possibly hurt me?"

"There's your mother—" she began. For a moment he looked doubtful, but interrupted her immediately with, "Indeed, Evelyn, you do my mother an injustice. She'll be the first to understand when she knows what happened. Of course she was a bit scared at first—" he laughed again, "and Sherring will make it worse, but I shall write first thing in the morning, and then I'm sure she'll be glad and proud that I acted as I did."

She did not look altogether convinced, but dried her eyes and only asked—

"But won't it make a difference to your church work and your pupils?"

"What of that?" he said, "if they're silly enough. It ought not to make any difference. But that's just it," he continued, turning away and running his long fingers through his hair as if to stir up his thoughts. "I've lately begun to suspect the —how shall I put it?—the wholesomeness of any circumstances that allow matters of personal conduct

to be mixed up with one's work. If your work requires you to cramp yourself, it's wrong somehow."

"That's all very well, Dick," she admitted, "but you've got to consider your living. I don't want to depress you," she continued, eyeing him anxiously, "but, you know, I'm afraid you're done for in Draycote."

"Done for in Draycote!" he echoed scornfully. "Done for in Draycote! It really does sound appalling, doesn't it? Look here, Evelyn," he said, flushing boyishly and speaking with embarrassment, "I don't think I'm conceited, but I suppose my—talent, if you like,—has a certain market value. That is to say, I can do certain things more than average well, but—this is the point—I've never done them quite so well as I might, because there's never been any motive stronger than pleasing myself. Of course I know that sounds like heresy; the work for its own sake ought to be enough—and I don't think I've ever been slovenly or too easily satisfied—but history shows that it never is enough. I doubt if even Beethoven would have been as big as he was if it had not been for Leonora. What I have needed all along has been—well, just you, Evelyn."

She winced slightly as if his words shamed her.

"But, Dick, you're so young," she said, "doesn't it seem frightfully rash to pledge yourself at twenty-two to anything so—so hopeless? I can give you so little in return."

"You can give me inspiration and courage—and a little love."

"I'm not worth it, Dick, I'm not worth it," she murmured, turning away her head in sincere humility, while her eyes filled with tears.

"Dear," he said, coming nearer, "will you do something for me?" He did not observe the almost frightened look that came into her eyes, but continued, "I shan't feel that you really trust me until you have taken off your outdoor things."

The colour came back into her cheeks with a rush of relief, and she laughed.

"Silly boy," she said, "of course I will, if you like."

She went through the double doors into the next room, the position of which confirmed the accuracy of Sherring's observation. Feddon opened the piano, and the exact nature of his work was immediately made clear. He struck the keys with the precision of the highly-trained artist, testing the resonance and delicacy of the instrument, listening with bent head and a look of gravity which contrasted oddly with the boyish frankness of his expression hitherto. Seen in profile his face had a strikingly gipsy-like character. His brows were drawn down over a rather large and strongly-curved nose, depressed at the point; his thin lips, now compressed, protruded sharply, accentuating the prominence of his firmly-moulded chin. Apparently he was agreeably surprised by the quality of the piano. He was playing a

Prelude of Chopin when Evelyn re-entered the room. She came forward with a prettily downcast air as he sprang from the stool, his hands resting on the keys and his absorbed expression remaining for a moment longer.

"That's better," he said, with a flush and smile of gratitude; "now you look as if you were in your own home."

Without her coat the suppleness and fragility of her person were more apparent. She was rather below the average height of women, but finely proportioned, so that she did not look small; and for all her slenderness her arms and bust were softly rounded. The black morning-gown she wore was collarless, exposing the curiously delicate line from ear to chin of her rather wide lower jaw. She had bathed her face, and the traces of crying were nearly gone from her eyes, which, darkly brown, had an almost purplish bloom as she looked up at Feddon under the gaslight. The line of her upper lip was depressed into a point in the centre, giving her a look at once of mystery and childlike innocence.

Feddon's immediate concern was expressed in "I do hope you'll be comfortable here." To his masculine mind there were a hundred things he might have forgotten, and he was desperately afraid lest she should brood over some small omission when a word would have given him the cue. He anxiously asked how she liked the room, which was furnished and decorated if not with taste, at least

with discretion, and remarked that the piano was quite respectable. "If there's anything you would like, dear, promise me you'll ask," he said, resting his hands on her shoulders as if she had been a child. Lightly as he touched her she winced, with a little twist of her mouth. "What—?" he began, and she dropped her eyes.

"Nothing, Dick," she murmured, with a shame-faced laugh; "only where he— But don't let's talk about that."

Feddon's face flamed, he clenched his hands and ground his teeth, and the muscles of his jaw and the veins on his forehead stood out like cords. For a moment he looked hideous. "Oh, the hound!" he muttered chokingly.

"So you see I couldn't go back to him, anyhow," she said brightly; turning away to pat her dark brown hair into shape before the glass of the overmantel, as if out of delicacy she would not look at him while he suffered the torture of remembering her tender flesh bruised and himself not by to protect her. It was as if in that long emotional silence between them they agreed to bury the past, for when by the reflection of his face in the glass she saw that he had mastered his quivering rage, she asked him in a matter-of-fact tone about his own plans.

"I shall stop in town for a week or so," he said, "with Fairclough. He's the sort of man who takes it as a compliment if you drop in at three o'clock in the morning and ask for dinner. He was Professor at the Academy in my time, you know,—Foreman

of the Factory, Piano Department, he called himself. When I asked him why he resigned, he said it was on account of moral scruples; he couldn't identify himself any longer with a system of musical education which refused to recognise the Pianola and the Angelus—trades-union jealousy he called it. Fairclough knows everybody, and it will please him tremendously if I go to him for advice."

For Feddon, as they sat one on each side of the hearth talking gaily, she might have been a very dear sister. He cheerfully did not allow his mind to dwell upon, or even to skirt, any closer intimacy. As they were to go on, he thought, so they must begin; though there was always a roseate possibility, how or when to be reached he would not consider: he was thus delightfully conscious all the time, it was brought to his mind every minute by some little unfamiliarity, that she was not his sister.

Presently there was a discreet tap at the door. In answer to Evelyn's "Come in," Mrs. Kemp announced dinner. Dick rose with confused apologies, but Evelyn said—

"Deny Mr. Fairclough for once, and stop and have some dinner with me, Dick."

"Oh, may I?" he cried delightedly. Mrs. Kemp smiled.

"I have laid for Mr. Feddon," she said.

Evelyn saw that Feddon found something extremely offensive in Mrs. Kemp's manner. She herself certainly disliked the woman's over-friendliness, but she was at the same time anxious to

conciliate her, and ashamed that she should be less nice in judgment than Feddon himself. As if to make up for some subconscious disloyalty to him, she was during dinner all gaiety and tenderness, as if indeed she were pathetically determined to make the most of an opportunity which might never happen again; all the more because it was evident that he took the hour gratefully, as earnest of a new understanding between them, the beginning of a new life from which he confidently hoped to gain great happiness. She drank wine and smoked a cigarette with him, less, as he saw, because she cared for the indulgence than to bring them nearer together.

"I want to think only of our two selves this evening," she said, her eyes dewy with emotion; "and you'll understand, dear, that I can't talk about things or discuss plans. I won't soil this hour, which is altogether our own, by thinking about the past or the future. I shall have to be practical presently — you don't know how practical I can be when I give my mind to it—but not to-night."

Upstairs she made herself comfortable in the arm-chair before the fire, while he sat on the rug with his head against her knee. Her six years seniority, and the undefined though persistent sense that she was wronging him, made her manner to him almost maternal. When she said—

"Oh, Dick, why didn't we meet years ago!" she was regretting things that he knew nothing about. The generous way in which he misunderstood her only increased her compunction.

"I won't have you say that," he said. "There's no second-best for us; everything is perfect, and I'm more thankful than I can say that we had to win our right to happiness. You know, Evelyn, I believe that even if we had never met our hearts would have been somewhere crying out for each other; but still, if Fate had been—I won't say kinder, because this is miraculously kind—but easier, and we had found each other as boy and girl, we should not have known the agony of loneliness which has driven us together like drowning people from a wreck."

"Don't expect too much of me, Dick," she said sadly.

"Oh, but I know you," he cried triumphantly, "much better than you know yourself. Some day I shall tell you the steps by which I learned you. Don't think that I fell into an infatuation for your face, beautiful as that is. I learned you bit by bit, as I learned to understand the Ninth Symphony. Every day you came clearer and clearer, and when at last I understood, I made up my mind—what this evening stands for became my one purpose in life."

Whether, because he was content with so little, or because she wished as far as possible to make up to him for what she denied, or, possibly, because at the bottom of her nature, and unknown to herself, she was piqued that he was content with so little, she seemed reluctant to let him go. Every time he spoke about going she pressed him to stay a little longer, so that it was eleven o'clock before he took

his leave. At the last moment he was taken with embarrassment, which he tried to conceal by talking jestingly about Fairclough.

"He'll be offended if I come prepared for the night," he said; "so, if you don't mind, I'll leave my bag here and call for it in the morning."

He said "good-night" hurriedly at the head of the stairs, but she followed him down, saying, "I'll let you out myself, Dick." Mrs. Kemp came out of the dining-room as they stood in the passage while he buttoned up his overcoat. After the manner of her kind, she overdid her assumption of surprise at Feddon's departure. She was too admirably trained to say anything, but she looked a great deal, and after an arch "good-night" to Feddon, slowly ascended the stairs. To Feddon it was as if an evil breath had tarnished the bright surface of that evening, so that his manner as he turned to Evelyn was slightly chilled.

"Why are you so distant, Dick?" she asked, holding his hand.

He muttered distractedly and dropped his eyes. She turned away her head and sighed. Then with an adorable air of modesty she held up her face, murmuring, "This must not be a precedent—but just to-night!" He kissed her as he might have kissed a child; then she pushed him gently away and held open the door. His last vision was of her slim figure, warmed by the light behind, seen through the narrowed space of the half-closed door; her attitude, with one arm raised to bar him

out, was that of a reluctant warder, and he was glad to believe that she was crying.

The policeman whose duties led him to pay periodical visits to Sidney Gardens during that night had his suspicions about the young man he so frequently encountered. Since, however, that person showed no sign of fear, but walked as if on air with his head in the clouds, and since there was no telling him to "move on" as he was constantly moving, he dismissed the idea of cross-examination and fell upon sarcasm, as much, at least, as he could put into "Oh, good-morning, sir." Life seldom allows the theorist and the expert witness to come together at the right moment, or Umney might have had conclusive support of his perspicacity; and once more the Idealist had triumphed over the man of the world.

CHAPTER III

How much of delicacy, how much of actual fear, prevented Umney and Sherring from reporting in person to Mrs. Feddon the failure of their mission, must be left to the reader's judgment. Umney wrote the bare facts from London, but the personal interview, as they both knew, was not to be evaded, and they waited jealously for the summons each dreaded yet grudged the other. Sherring hoped that both would be called, when he might mutely show his injuries, while Umney, however unwillingly, would in sheer decency be compelled to sing his courage. With this end he, greatly to Umney's annoyance, did nothing to encourage the healing of his wounded lip.

"You can't think how odd you look, Sherring," said Umney, who had paid him an evening visit to escape the curiosity his wife did not show. "If it had been on your forehead, or even a black eye, it would not have been so bad. It destroys your dignity so, to speak with a crooked mouth."

"What a woman you are!" retorted Sherring; "you would remind me of Alcibiades—only you're too fat."

The thing rankled, and when, on the second day

after his return from London, Umney received the invitation to lunch which could only be interpreted as a command to make a clean breast of his share in the failure, his natural fear was tempered with elation that he should be chosen as spokesman for the two. Neither he, nor fortunately Sherring, comprehended that the choice had been made by an angry woman in want of somebody to browbeat, and consequently inclined to that person least capable of self-defence. Sherring, indeed, did his best to discourage his friend by pointing out that it was only natural that Mrs. Feddon should send for her lawyer. Himself, he said, she could not with propriety command. It was always a disappointment to Umney, as Sherring knew, that Mrs. Umney refused to be jealous of Mrs. Feddon.

"Don't bleat, Umney," were his parting words, "you're not dealing with a sentimental girl—I should say nothing about his having struck me. Of course, I knew at the start the risks we were running, and I shouldn't like Mrs. Feddon to be worried by hearing about his brutality."

Umney was more than a little surprised by Mrs. Feddon's calmness. She was a still beautiful woman of about forty-two, with purely cut lips, a serene forehead, and dark-blue eyes which Evelyn Alemere said asked you not to let her physical attractions blind you to her moral superiority. Assuming that a woman insists upon her virtue in proportion to her need of it, Mrs. Feddon, she argued, deserved canonisation. She had married

young, said the same authority, for the good of the race; consistently choosing a sailor for the purpose; and Commander Feddon had been discouraged from living when the cause, rather than the result, of his selection was ten years old.

During luncheon Mrs. Feddon made no reference to her son. It was her way contemptuously to keep a good table, as if she flattered her own indifference to luxury by indulging her guests. Having mentally placed you, she kept you there; and she regarded Umney's poor efforts at eating with amused toleration, as if she despised a person who could allow even the most tragic event to affect his propensities. Umney wished for Sherring's insolence, and grew more nervous. She callously left him to a cigarette. He did not want to smoke, and began to suspect that Mrs. Feddon was deliberately keeping him on tenter-hooks. A silent maid brought him coffee. He had an insane impulse to talk confidentially with the servant, to ask her how Mrs. Feddon bore herself under her affliction; but he could get no further than asking for a whisky-and-soda, he felt compelled to explain for dietetic reasons. He felt like a helot as he crossed the hall, furtively wiping his mouth at the drawing-room door.

Mrs. Feddon was examining two etchings of the Cathedral—or rather two states of the same etching—and insisted on his judgment. To the unhappy man there was nothing to choose between them, but he spoke for that in her right hand. Then she

asked his reason. With an ingenuity which at the moment seemed diabolical she impressed him with the importance of his decision. He remembered Evelyn Alemere's remark that Mrs. Feddon's pictures and furniture illustrated renunciation rather than preference; as if they were the choice of a person who knew what was best in life and art, but ruthlessly abandoned whatever might war against the soul. Everything, even at the risk of seeming Philistine, was twice selected; you could swear to the spiritual standard not only of the work but of the man who did it. To Umney's mind the whole fabric of Mrs. Feddon's house at this moment hung upon his choice; she indicated the very space waiting on the wall for this keystone of her material affairs. He remembered with regret that he had allowed her to believe him interested in, and not a little informed upon, the fine arts. She gave him to understand that she relied absolutely on his judgment as, he could not but think symbolically, she had relied upon his discretion in the business they were presently to discuss. It was inconceivable that she had invited him to lunch merely to select her etchings. Pressed for his answer, he stammered—

"I like that one."

"You like that one," she repeated, laying the prints aside without saying which she preferred, and, immediately, as if she had said in parenthesis "tried and found wanting," went on—

"Well, did you see the woman?"

"What woman?" he began, and blushed under her cold regard.

"I beg you will put aside all but practical considerations, Mr. Umney," she said wearily; and with a flash of insight he saw that whether as a mother or only in her principles she was desperately hard hit. Characteristically, Umney put her maternal affection first, and he felt all the inner glow of the prophet who might justifiably prophesy smooth things.

"If you ask me my opinion," he said brightly, "Richard is as blameless as even you could wish him to be—except, of course, that he has acted unconventionally, even foolishly."

She studied him for a moment in unapproving silence.

"I asked you to be practical," she said; "not for your opinion," was implied. "I understood from your letter that you found them under the same roof."

Umney was not quite perceptive enough to understand that Richard's mother despised him exactly for his habit of rounding off the edges of unpleasant truths.

"There's nothing wrong in that, of course," he said boldly; "and for my part I don't see why people need be talked about because they happen to spend an evening in the same house."

"They didn't 'happen,' and they will be talked about," she interrupted emphatically, tapping the table with her delicate forefinger. Then Umney,

with his fatal preconception of her chilly altitude above the gossiping herd, and seeing a fine opening for claiming an equally unworldly point of view, went on to tell her his private opinion of their neighbours and his utter disregard for the look of things.

"But it is precisely the look of things that matters in this instance," she retorted impatiently, thus bringing his argument about his ears and entirely confusing his aim. How was he to know what she wanted? he thought in aggrieved fashion; and with the facility of the person who is anxious to please he jumped to the conclusion that she wanted to have her faith in her son confirmed. He said that he staked his honour on Richard's purity.

"Please don't defend my son's character to me, Mr. Umney," she said sharply. "That is the one thing that must remain out of this discussion. I have no more doubt of my son than I have of myself. We have to deal altogether with appearances, and I want you to give me a clear idea what those appearances are. Perhaps," she said, leaning back in her chair and folding her hands, "you had better tell me the story from the beginning. You see," she added, he could not help thinking disingenuously, "there is no actual proof—I mean so far as outsiders are considered—that they did go to London together."

Umney was nettled both by her refusal to accept his opinion and her implied distrust of his observa-

tion, and he made the most of his and Sherring's preliminary investigations. She looked surprised.

"The station people are abominably idle," she said, "but I should hardly have supposed that even they would have leisure to notice and remark upon every passenger who got into the train."

"But we took particular care to question the porters," said Umney triumphantly.

"Oh," she said, and smiled. Then she continued, "Well, then, it is known that they went to London by the same train," — "thanks to you and Mr. Sherring," was implied, — "and what happened then?"

Smarting under the suggestion that he and Sherring were responsible for the spread of gossip, Umney decided not to spare her, and he repeated Sherring's opinion of Mrs. Kemp. The phrase went off like a damp squib; Mrs. Feddon merely nodded and said—

"And then you saw them?"

"We saw him," he corrected her, and gave a slightly ennobled account of the interview. They had appealed to Richard's honour, to his affection for his mother, to his ambition, even to his common-sense. Without disloyalty to Sherring, Umney contrived to suggest that while his absent friend had admirably put before the boy the practical inconvenience of his position, he himself had taken the higher plane. Mrs. Feddon listened with a reflective smile, and at the end observed—

"You appealed to his ideas of romance and

chivalry?" Umney bowed. "You confirmed—yes, I don't think that is too strong a word—Richard in his belief that he was doing a very fine thing. Your sentimental generalities gave him just the right glow of remorseful enthusiasm, while Mr. Sherring very concisely, as only Mr. Sherring can, put together all the things he was flinging away for her sake—the world well lost for her—that sort of thing."

Umney shrank before her uncanny intuition of Sherring's very words, but pulled himself together when she asked abruptly—

"Were you ever in love, Mr. Umney?"

It was disgustingly unfair, Umney thought, on such an impossible occasion to tantalise him with the opportunity he had so often desired for hinting at sentimental experiences. The best he could do on the spur of the moment was to look at her and say nothing.

"Well, what could we do?" he asked feebly, after the significant silence.

"Do!" she exclaimed, with such energy that he jumped; "you should have made him ashamed of her. You are men of the world,"—Umney felt his years mercilessly summed up in her glance at him,—"you cannot be mistaken in this woman, you must have a clear knowledge of her selfishness, her vanity, her utter faithlessness. You should have torn her to shreds before his eyes until he was sick with contempt for himself and her. Oh, I could——"

She stopped suddenly, a little flushed and with

her eyes glittering so that the startled man already in imagination saw her finger-nails at work upon the other woman's face. Yet for all his alarm he felt a prurient satisfaction, as if he had been admitted to unspeakable intimacies, had seen Melpomene dishevelled.

"We had hardly the right to abuse her," he protested. She smiled bitterly.

"It is curious," she said, "how interesting a woman becomes to the male mind the moment she loses her sense of decency. I suppose that is at the bottom of all chivalry: it is only a little more and French jurymen weep over the *crime passionel.* However, you spared the woman, and then?"

"But indeed Sherring did not spare her," said Umney. "He told Richard that he was being led away by a designing woman—and Richard knocked him down."

"Oh!" she said, surprised for the first time, and Umney could have sworn that there was a gleam of satisfaction in her eyes. He was puzzled and irritated. What was to be done with a woman who described the proper line of attack and then approved her son's brutal resentment? Something of this must have appeared in Umney's face, for she dropped her eyes demurely upon her hands which lay folded in her lap.

"I trust Mr. Sherring was not much hurt," she murmured.

"Physically no," he replied seriously; "though of course he was very much upset."

"Will you please tell him how very sorry I am that Richard so far forgot himself?" she said, raising her eyes with a shyly confidential look in them which made Umney hate Sherring. He was loyal, however, and began to tell her that, like himself, Sherring was prepared in her interest to suffer the worst that Richard or the world could do, but she, now again sober and collected, interrupted him.

"You see, Mr. Umney," she said, passing her long white hand over her forehead, "from what you tell me there is a plausible basis for whatever gossip may be flying about the village. There isn't a single fact that can be denied. Richard did go away to London with this woman, he took rooms for her in his own name, and upon Mr. Sherring protesting he resorted to violence."

"For the matter of that," said Umney significantly, "you may rely on Mr. Sherring's discretion. Sherring won't blab."

"Oh, surely," she said with dignity, and ignoring his innuendo; "but you see yourself that there's nothing to be done whatever. Richard must await the consequences of his folly."

To which he said feebly that the affair might blow over. She took no notice of his encouragement, but coldly, and as if she were discussing a case in which she had no personal interest, went on to define the probable consequences. She alluded to the previous certainty of Richard's appointment to the vacant post of organist to the Weirminster

Cathedral. That of course was now extremely improbable. The authorities were tactful. Dean Maidment, indeed, as Mr. Umney knew, was her very good friend; everything would be done in order and with the least possible unpleasantness to herself; but, frankly, all the machinery of Richard's disgrace was now ready and only waited the hand of the engineer, which obviously was Mr. Alemere's.

"Everything depends on him," she said; "people may talk, as they probably are talking, but until he acts nobody can do anything. Richard may lose a pupil or two, but unless Mr. Alemere brings an action, and gets a verdict, no reason can be openly stated."

Umney's imagination presented a task still more unpleasant than that he had undertaken with Sherring. Alemere was a big man, irascible at any time, as all Draycote knew.

"You will appeal to Mr. Alemere?" he asked fearfully.

Mrs. Feddon's eyes lightened with one of her rare flashes of humour.

"No, I can hardly do that," she said, checking herself on the edge of something satirical, "but I shall try my hardest to disprove any charge Mr. Alemere may bring against my son—and that," she said, turning full upon him with her beautiful smile, "is where yours and Mr. Sherring's evidence, or rather, your silence, will be so valuable." She allowed a slight emphasis on the word "silence" and continued: "But of course it is absolutely

necessary that you should conceal nothing from me. I want to know quite the worst that can be said. This person, Kemp, now? Supposing Mr. Alemere brings an action for divorce against his wife——"

"I don't believe—" began Umney stoutly, but she raised her eyebrows, saying,

"That is unnecessary and hardly courteous after what I have said. I *know* that Richard is innocent. But let us keep to the look of things. So far as I can gather from what you saw and heard, Mrs. Kemp is the only important witness either side can call; altogether she is a most important person. Now, what do you think about her?"

"She gave us the impression of being in Mrs. Alemere's confidence," said Umney, brilliantly for him.

"Then she is most emphatically Richard's enemy," said Mrs. Feddon. Umney imagined her alluding to Richard's higher self, and said that he agreed with her; but on her explaining that she meant that Mrs. Kemp was her son's enemy in relation to the outraged Mr. Alemere, he said frankly that he did not understand.

"Your whole behaviour shows that you do not—though, to be sure, poor Mr. Sherring had an inkling," she said, with the flicker of a smile. "It hasn't occurred to you then," she continued, "that Mrs. Alemere herself wants to be rid of her husband, and won't be particular what means she uses to get her freedom?"

Umney felt that he was learning something about

women, but thought it necessary to say that he couldn't believe Mrs. Alemere was so bad as all that.

"It isn't a question of badness," said Mrs. Feddon calmly, "she's a woman."

Umney did not attempt to solve the paradox.

"So unscrupulous, I mean," he murmured.

"She's just as unscrupulous as—as I am, for example," said Mrs. Feddon, bending forward.

"Oh," was all that the bewildered man could say.

"Have we talked all this time without your understanding me?" she asked wearily. "Can't you see that while I refuse to stain either myself or Richard by imagining him capable of a gross sin, I am determined to use any means, fair or unfair, to defeat the consequences of his stupidity? It's bad enough to have his name mixed up in this abominable scandal, it will be worse if things come into court; but what is worst of all, and what I shall do everything in my power to prevent, is the possibility of his marrying this woman."

Umney perceived that his ideas about Mrs. Feddon needed revision. He was a little proud that she had been thus frank with him; it certainly gave him a lead over Sherring.

"Now are things clear to you?" she asked, in a tone which he understood to mean dismissal. "I want you to put out of your head the idea that Richard's character is on trial. We have to fight for his reputation, and if that goes, then for his future. Richard is headstrong, and in this matter he will

have the defects of his virtues. If Mr. Alemere succeeds in the action he is sure to bring, it will be our task to see that my son is not sacrificed to his own chivalrous instincts and the calculations of an abandoned woman."

Umney found himself in the hall pondering upon her bravery and her intelligence. "Everything depends upon Alemere," he thought dubiously, and as the door was opened for him, there on the step stood Alemere himself, rubicund, heavy jawed. He was chewing the stump of a cigar, and in his eyes was the expression of an ox that has been partially stunned. He was carefully dressed, as usual, in a fawn covert-coat with large pearl buttons, and his big hands were encased in stiff yellow gloves. There was a full-blown red rose in his buttonhole, and he stood with his legs wide apart swinging a light cane, with a curved handle, on his forefinger.

"Hey, Umney!" was his greeting, as he flung away his cigar. "I needn't ask if Mrs. Feddon is at home."

Umney met his inquiry with a scared grin. Alemere, he thought, looked as if he wanted to talk about his loss then and there. He made his excuses and hurried away, though he would have given a week's income to be present at the imminent interview.

CHAPTER IV

"God bless my soul!" said Alemere, mentioning the two entities which his wife declared he most neglected, "you're looking younger than ever, Mrs. Feddon."

Mrs. Feddon, who made a rule of acknowledging sincerity however crudely expressed, winced, but smiled faintly and invited her visitor to be seated. Mrs. Feddon and Mrs. Alemere were only bowing acquaintances by the choice of the former, though Alemere's pride had compensation in the thought that young Feddon was paid to improve his wife's music. He frankly disclaimed all interest in that luxury: he bought her a music-master as he might have bought her a Borzoi, taking care that the article was the best that could be got for the money.

Alemere sat bolt upright on a high-backed chair, with his knees wide apart, one hand on each and his hat between his feet. He looked, as Mrs. Feddon had first described him, like a cab-driver.

"Heard from young Richard, ma'am?" he asked presently.

Mrs. Feddon looked at him with steady eyes, and said that she had written to Richard and that he was coming home in a day or two. Her expression

did not betray that Mrs. Alemere had any place in her mind.

Alemere blew out his cheeks and shook his head.

"'Pon my soul I'm right-down sorry, Mrs. Feddon," he said, with genuine feeling. "I'd have cut off my right hand to prevent it. To think that Evie should have brought this trouble upon you."

He looked round the large room as if its ordered refinement symbolised that inner peace which his wife's misdeed had violated, and his eyes fell upon a trailing plant standing on a table in the window recess. Gravely rising from his chair he crossed over to the plant, nipped out a central shoot, stirred the soil with his forefinger, walked to the fireplace and threw in the shoot, wiped his hands on a yellow silk pocket-handkerchief and returned to his place.

"Have you ever tried Jadoo Fibre, ma'am?" he asked, and receiving a negative answer, continued—

"I didn't think that Evie would go and do a thing like that. She's had everything that a woman can want: I've paid her bills like a man, and put up with her tantrums. But there, I suppose I've been too easy; perhaps if I'd trimmed her a little closer this would never have happened."

It was for all the world, Mrs. Feddon thought, as if his cow had got into her garden. She felt as if she ought to have begged him not to say any more about the matter.

"I've got a temper, I know, and I daresay you've heard how I fly out when it's roused," he went on heavily but with a sort of pride, as if he spoke of a

curious faculty for which he was not responsible; "but nobody can say that I've not been a good husband. Of course I'm not highly educated, but Evie knew that when she married me. What beats me, is this: why, if Evie wanted to make a fool of herself, she should have chosen your son Richard." He unconsciously drew himself up as if in comparison,—"a mere lad," he added; continuing, "People may say that I might have looked after them; but then I made it a point never to interfere with any of her whims that I did not understand. However, I see now that I ought to have warned Dick about her."

Her son's name was pronounced with such obvious affection that Mrs. Feddon's first instinctive resentment to the idea of his insignificance was disarmed.

"I hope you'll forgive me if I say anything that hurts you," she began nervously, and he looked at her in a non-comprehending way, his lips framing the words "hurts me?"—"but I can't help feeling that you have perhaps altogether misunderstood the relations between your wife and my son."

"That I have," he said, bringing his hand heavily down on his knee. "I can make nothing of them at all. I'm fond of music; I could almost cry over 'Silent, O Moyle' or 'Allan Water.' Those Frenchy things simply puzzle me, but I never thought they would lead to this or I should have put my foot down at the beginning."

"That is not quite what I mean," said Mrs. Feddon, "though indeed I believe that your wife's

—friendship — for my son was because she was able to talk to him about the things she was interested in. When people have tastes in common they are apt—selfishly, I grant you—to become absorbed in each other's conversation."

He nodded slowly.

"That's just why I was always glad to see Dick at my house," he said. "He did us both good: he kept Evie more contented, so that she did not worry me; and I—I liked the boy, though I don't think he cared overmuch for me. But that of course was chiefly Evie's fault; I expect she made me out stupider and coarser than I really am. I like to have young people about me." His lips quivered slightly, and he continued in a husky tone, "If I may say so to you, Mrs. Feddon, I think it's a pity Evie never would have a baby."

In spite of, or perhaps because of, her own great trouble and anxiety, Mrs. Feddon could not help feeling a profound pity for this big, strong, stupid man clumsily trying to define the difference between himself and his wife, and to explain as fairly as his sportsmanlike nature would allow him exactly where the blame lay. She saw, too, that his wife's great and unforgivable offence against him was that she had not acted in a sportsmanlike manner.

"It's possible, you know," she said, encouraged by his frankness, "that your wife found a companionship in my son which she could not find in yourself."

"That's just what I'm saying," he said eagerly;

"but she could have had his companionship as much as she liked without running away with him."

Mrs. Feddon was non-plussed by the simple justice and, in a way, the generosity of his argument. It was as much her repulsion from Mrs. Alemere as anything, which made her wish to be quite fair and to make him quite fair in his estimate of his wife's fault. And in all honesty it was as much for Mrs. Alemere as for her son that she said—

"Are you quite sure that she did run away with him in the ordinary sense? You see—" she hesitated, and continued with a painful effort, "I am Richard's mother, and nothing will make me believe that he is depraved."

"Then he's a bigger fool than I thought him, ma'am," said Alemere bluntly.

Somehow his coarse directness did not hurt her so much as she might have expected.

"'Fool' is the word," she agreed; "if he were guilty in the way most people will believe him guilty, he need not, as you say, have run away."

"What, Dick Feddon abuse my hospitality in my own house?" he said, opening his dull though prominent light-blue eyes wide upon her. "No, I'd never believe he would have done that."

She flushed, feeling herself corrected though she scarcely understood how. That he did not resent the implication on his wife gave her a vivid sense of the tragedy of his marriage.

"Well then," she said, "carry your good opinion of Richard—for which I am most deeply grateful

—a little further, and refuse to believe that he has abused his opportunity."

He sat silent, with his mouth screwed up, and shaking his head.

"No, ma'am, I can't," he said at length, "and there's an end of it."

She sighed, and perceiving that she had come to the bottom of his philosophy of men and women did not care to press the matter. She was very anxious to know what he intended to do, but the recognition that he had come not to complain but to apologise, as a man might for leaving his property in a thief's way, made it impossible for her to ask questions.

"If only Dick had come to me," he said, with no sense of absurdity, "he would never have been such a fool. It's a pity he hadn't a father to warn him —I'm not blaming you, ma'am, it wasn't women's work even if you'd known what was up. You know what happened?" he asked, looking up sharply.

"I had your letter," she said. He nodded.

"Yes, but I hadn't time to write more than 'stop him,'" he said. He stooped forward, following the pattern of the carpet with the point of his cane: apparently he was shamefacedly going over past events in his mind.

"The night before," he continued, "Evie had been particularly aggravating. I had brought Harry Laking — you know Harry Laking? — No? — in to dinner without letting her know beforehand—and Evie wouldn't come down. Sent word that she had

a headache, or some such tomfoolery. Well, when Harry was gone I went up to her room to have it out with her, and I found she had locked the door. I'd had a few whiskys, you know, and I kicked the door in. Then she let fly at me: my drunken habits, my friends not fit for a lady—even my dirty boots. And then," he flushed darkly over his face and thick neck, "I did what I've never done before, even when I was drunk. I struck her. . . . The rest you know. In the morning I found a letter saying that she couldn't live with me any longer, and that she'd gone to London with your son."

"I'm so very sorry," was all that Mrs. Feddon could say. Alemere looked at her consideringly, hummed in his throat, examined his gloves, stretching the seams, and then spoke—

"So was I, ma'am," he said, "at the time. When I read Evie's letter that morning I was ready to sit down and blubber, but since then I've been thinking things over. You see, Mrs. Feddon, sometimes a man hasn't the pluck to do the right thing for himself at the right time. We'd talked about a separation before; I'd got my solicitor to draw up papers and all that, but somehow when it came to the point it seemed foolish that a full-grown man and woman couldn't live together without quarrelling like a pair of kids, and so the idea fell through. And we *had* got at some sort of an understanding, you know; she went one way with her books and her music, and I went another with my hothouses and my cattle: though, to be sure, it was a poor

enough sort of life, like a plant that won't bloom—there were no flowers on it, if I may speak poetically. . . . I'm not blaming Evie, mind: it was as much my fault as hers, and I've come to the conclusion that I made a great mistake in not taking her first 'no' for an answer when I asked her to marry me. There had been another man she cared about, you know, but her parents made difficulties of some sort, and he went abroad, and has never been heard of since."

Mrs. Feddon's heart sank lower as he went on talking. She saw that he was making up his mind, slowly but surely. At present he was ashamed to admit even to himself that his wife's absence was a relief. He, with his passionate full-blooded nature, would probably have moments of regret and longing, but the longer he experienced the advantages of freedom the less likely he would be to ask his wife to return to him. He was very proud, and the same sort of pride which made him claim that he had been mistaken, not in his wife's character but in his capacity to live peaceably with her, his pride in his defects, as it were, would help to confirm him in his determination to avoid further trouble. Mrs. Feddon could not, of course, defend Mrs. Alemere to her injured husband, but she thought she might suggest to him that his injury was not irreparable. She began to talk about her son's chivalrous admiration for Mrs. Alemere, his appreciation of her musical talent, and boyish desire to be of service to her. She put it to Alemere's generosity that it was only natural that Dick should take his wife's side of

the quarrel; that he should imagine her ill-used. Alemere listened respectfully enough at first, then smiled knowingly and fidgeted with his cane, and finally burst into a loud "Haw! haw!"

"That's Evie all over!" he said, with a sort of perverted appreciation, and slapping his knee, "she'd diddle a K.C. into believing that she was a martyr."

"That's a talent we women have," she said brightly; "and so without any personal feeling against you, the boy quite wrong-headedly came to think it his duty to help her. And then when he heard that—you'll forgive my alluding to it?—that you had struck her, well, you know yourself what you would have done if you knew that a man struck a woman."

"I should have given him a damned good licking," said Alemere complacently, "but I should have taken care not to let the woman know it. . . . But that's not the point. I think Evie was playing it low down to vent her spite against me on a boy like him. It puts me in such an awkward position, you see; because I like Dick, and should be sorry to do him an ill turn. I grant you I was a beast to hit her, but I was half drunk, and she seemed to take a delight in aggravating me. I can't see what there is to dislike in Harry Laking; he's a thoroughly good sort, and though he may not be quite a gentleman by birth, he always knows how to behave himself, and he's most attentive to Evie. You see, Mrs. Feddon, if Evie made herself more pleasant to my friends, I shouldn't get taking so much whisky: you know what men are when they're left to them-

selves. That's what a woman's for, I take it, to keep a man straight. Between ourselves, Mrs. Feddon, there were lots of ways in which Evie might have been a better wife to me, but I shouldn't have thought of asking anybody to take sides against her. A man doesn't do that. If I was too much of a brute to live with, why didn't Evie go off alone? She could have got a separation afterwards, on her own account. Why need she go and drag your son into the quarrel? 'Tisn't sporting, that's what I say."

His confidences encouraged Mrs. Feddon to risk a suggestion

"Don't you think, Mr. Alemere," she said, "that when your wife recognises how very foolishly she has behaved she will come back to you?"

"Oh no," said he, "I couldn't allow that. Why," he added, staring at her, "I should be laughed at."

Intelligent as Mrs. Feddon was, she did not see that his regard for the look of things was as justifiable as hers.

"Of course," he went on, digging at the carpet with his cane, "I'm quite willing to give her an allowance big enough to keep her comfortably, but not enough to enable her to get up to any pranks. What do you think of three hundred pounds a year, paid quarterly through my solicitor?"

"I think you are very generous, Mr. Alemere," said Mrs. Feddon gravely; "but, if you'll pardon my saying so, I don't think you are generous in quite the right way."

"I was coming to that," he said. "If you think

that it would be better to pay the money to Richard——"

"Oh!" she said, with a deep flush. Alemere looked embarrassed.

"I beg your pardon, ma'am," he murmured, "but I don't quite see what you mean."

Mrs. Feddon's accepted position as the apostle of Draycote's highest ethical standard enabled her to talk vitally without being self-conscious or seeming priggish; and Alemere's very simplicity, his careful weighing what she said, helped her to say things that she might have hesitated over with a gaping appreciator like Umney, for example. She ventured to put before her visitor her sincere and personal views of the sanctity and indissolubility of marriage. Alemere listened respectfully, but scratched his head: it was clear that he only half understood her, and that he reserved his opinion. Independent in most things, he seemed incapable of taking any but a conventional view of his wife's desertion. "I should be laughed at," was for him the final answer.

Mrs. Feddon recognised that it was an odd sort of interest in this big, obstinate man which made her ask him to stop and take tea with her. He was so different from her other male acquaintances in Draycote, who made her a sort of oracle in questions of principle. Possibly because Umney was fresh in her memory she felt that she despised them for it, and also that she suspected their sincerity. Alemere's point of view, of course, revolted her, but at the same time aroused her curiosity.

She liked Alemere's rough but easy manners as he drank his tea: he struck her as the first man she had ever seen who was not ashamed of his appetite. She drew him on to talk about his hothouses. At first he was almost boorishly reticent, but when he understood, with obvious surprise, that a woman could be interested in such things, that she was not asking questions out of politeness, he talked eagerly and intelligently about his experiments in cross-breeding, his orchids, and his cacti. He described with almost poetic enthusiasm how he had sat up to be present at the unfolding of a night-blooming Cereus. Evie had not shared the vigil, which, it was clear, had for him the character of a religious rite. But then, as he admitted, he did not go to church with Evie. Mrs. Feddon saw the pathos of the situation, though she tried to reserve her sympathy: people who married merely for the satisfaction of their lower instincts deserved their loneliness.

"Well," said Alemere presently, rising and casting a troubled glance round the room, "I couldn't feel comfortable until I'd been to see you. I've said what I had to say, and—I'd like you to tell Dick that I don't bear him any ill-will. I wish with all my heart that I'd kept a sharper look-out over Evie's manœuvres. Of course there was nasty gossip going about, but I treated it with the contempt I thought it deserved. . . . Well, good-bye, ma'am, and I shall be honoured at any time to take you over my hothouses."

CHAPTER V

It was characteristic of Mrs. Feddon's magnificently confidential relation with her son that, when he returned from London on Saturday afternoon, after four days' absence from home, she asked him only one question. When, as she sat alone in the half light, he entered the room in his usual impetuous manner and stooped over her, she held him by the arm for a moment, saying, "You can kiss me, Dick?" and he answered, "Yes, mother," with a perfect understanding of her meaning. Nothing further was said at the time beyond a reference to the Friday's choir practice at Draycote Church, which Mrs. Feddon had arranged for with the schoolmaster, who was Dick's deputy. Dick asked for his letters, rang for a light, and standing before the fireplace tore open one envelope after another with a running commentary on their contents while swallowing his tea. Except that he was in noticeably high spirits, and moved and spoke with even more decision than usual, there was no outward change in him since he left home. His silence with regard to his movements in London, and her abstention from questioning him, were quite natural, since the characteristic feature of their

ordinary intercourse was a fastidious regard for each other's privacy. Evelyn Alemere declared that they exchanged cards once a week. When Dick had finished his tea, he bundled his letters and papers together and went into his own study behind the dining-room, and his mother heard him trying over on the piano some pieces of music which had come by post. His mental detachment in this crisis was, she thought, a signal proof that he had come to the end of his boyhood, and she knew that at the bottom of her heart more than anything she resented his sudden maturity.

They talked but little during dinner, which for them was always a slightly formal meal. They were the only persons in Draycote who dressed for dinner every evening. To-night each was wondering when and in what words the other would make the first reference to Evelyn Alemere. Dick himself was eager to talk about her, but his knowledge of his mother's peculiar pride restrained him: it would have been quite like her, he humorously recognised, to have said "Who is Evelyn Alemere?" Usually Dick went to his study for an hour or so after taking coffee with his mother, but to-night he remained in the drawing-room. She supposed that he wished to give her an opportunity, and she decided, if possible, to make him speak first. His quiet determination, for he did not fidget or pretend to read, pleased her as a sign of character, though it confirmed her belief that he had quite made up his mind. She, who allowed nothing to disturb

not so much her habits as her rule of life, sat in an arm-chair at a little distance from the wood-fire with a volume of Matthew Arnold. Her little red morocco-covered notebook lay on a lacquer table, a memorial of her husband's last voyage to the China station, ready to her hand. Mrs. Feddon, who hated slovenliness in all things, was a very systematic reader. Every year she made out a list of books to be read, and in the drawer of her writing-table she kept a pile of uniformly bound notebooks dated and indexed. In spite of the season both windows were wide open and the blinds up; "letting her light shine forth," as Mrs. Alemere said. Mrs. Feddon would have no shades on her lamps: she disliked material snugness as much as she did moral ambiguity; she kept her house as she did her life, clean swept, white lit and well aired.

After the maid had removed the tray, Dick rose from his chair and went over and stood with his back to the fire.

"Mother," he said abruptly, "would you care very much if I withdrew my application for the Cathedral post?"

She closed her book and laid it down. For a moment it was on her lips to say "probably you will be compelled to," but an unwillingness she recognised as cowardly even to put her fears into words prevented her.

"That depends entirely on your motives," she said, looking up at him steadily. "I know this

sounds priggish, but if it is because you feel yourself to be unworthy I should prefer that you did."

"No, it isn't that," he said; adding, with a look of surprise, "Don't you think I am competent then?"

"Of course you are," she said emphatically; "you are far and away the best musician of the three selected candidates, and it is almost certain that the post will be offered to you. But, as you might have known, that's not what I mean. I regard the giver, not the gift. I recognise that everything devoted to the service of God ought to be as perfect as possible, but the spiritual state of the giver is a matter of far greater consequence."

He restrained his impulse to cry out on the logical absurdity of her argument, because he knew that it was as a minister and not as an artist that she wished to see him in the organ-loft of the Cathedral.

"But," he said, "are you sure that there's not a little worldliness at the bottom of it? The distinction, the respectability, that sort of thing? Otherwise I don't see why I couldn't serve God just as well in Draycote parish church."

"That's not very generous, Dick," she said. "If you had entered the priesthood, as I wished, it would be only natural that I should rather see you a bishop than a curate. Since you decided to devote yourself to music, I want you to have the widest possible scope for the exercise of your talents. But we are beating about the bush. Why do you wish to withdraw your application?"

He eagerly seized the opportunity to explain his red-hot gospel so lately matured. Frankly, the Cathedral appointment did not offer the widest scope for the exercise of his talents. It required him to narrow his life, and consequently his artistic impulses, in obedience to conventional rules of conduct. A man could not do his best work under conditions.

Mrs. Feddon listened with a bitter smile, and when he had finished she said—

"If I had wanted an illustration of how far you had fallen I could not have chosen a more perfect one than this. You excuse yourself for misconduct by saying that your art requires you to be yourself."

"No, mother," he said, flushing, "I don't admit that I have done or wish to do anything wrong, and I should have come to exactly the same conclusion if I had never met Evelyn."

They were both rather thankful that her name had slipped into the discussion while they were off their guard.

"May I talk about her?" asked Dick boyishly. His mother sighed.

"I don't see that it's any use, Dick," she said, "but I'm quite willing to listen to you."

Dick's defence of Mrs. Alemere only put his own character in a stronger light for his mother. She recognised that he had a sincere and most enthusiastic faith in the woman whose cause he had taken up, but she was unwilling to believe that

he was moved altogether by impulsive generosity or by a youthful infatuation. Her habit of mind and her prejudices led her to search farther back, to the time of her first disappointment in him, and to regard his impassioned account of his friendship with Evelyn Alemere as a special pleading for his own desertion from the austere ideals she had long ago put before him. Yet as, with head flung back and flashing eyes, he walked restlessly about the room, she was forced to admit that he made out a good case for the romantic view of life. He asserted that he did not regret for one moment what he had done. He had been privileged to gain the confidence and, in spite of what people like Umney and Sherring might insinuate, the pure affection of a young, beautiful, and exquisitely sensitive woman, who, from what ignorance of life God only knew, had married a man in every sense her inferior. Her sufferings were not any the less real because they were chiefly mental. She had not complained; she had bravely lived her life, neglected by her husband, misunderstood by her neighbours, and finding her only consolation in music and religion. For a long time he had wondered who the woman was who stole into church during his organ practice. Her singing lessons, as his mother knew, were at Alemere's own suggestion. She had never spoken of her troubles except in that one involuntary cry "Oh, Dick, I'm so unhappy!" startled out of her by a word of sympathy when he had seen traces of tears on her face. But indeed it was not

necessary for her to speak: everybody knew what Alemere was. Dick could swear that he had never spoken a word of love to Evelyn: theirs was a silent comradeship, because he, out of all the world, understood. When the crisis came, when her brute of a husband, having already insulted her past bearing, had raised his hand and struck her dear, tender body, so that it would have been a positive crime for her to have remained any longer under his roof, what could be more natural than that she should turn to him, the only friend she had? She could not go out into the world alone and unprotected, and she had paid him the highest compliment that any woman could pay any man by asking his help.

"I should have been the basest of creatures if I had deserted her then," he said. "What would you have thought of me, mother, if I had refused to help her?"

"I'll only ask you one question, Dick," she said, ignoring his own; "suppose Mrs. Alemere had been old and ugly?"

"I would have done it for any woman," he said eagerly, and in spite of herself she believed him, and regretted the opening she had given. As she expected, he continued, "That's exactly it: if Evelyn had been old and ugly there would have been no scandal; people would have understood the truth. As it is, and from what that cold-blooded beast Sherring hinted, I suppose our names are being dirtied by all the filthy mouths in Draycote. But

I thank God that doesn't trouble me. I won't insult you, mother, by assuring you——"

"That will do, Dick," she said, with a look of pain. "I know you are innocent of any gross sin; your temptations take a subtler form. They come from your pride. You acted as you did because your sense of chivalry would have been offended if you had refused, but what you don't see is that chivalry itself is based upon a false glamour of beauty and adorable weakness—on a series of lies, in fact. I'm quite willing to believe that you acted from a sense of duty, but then your sense of duty was already perverted. . . . I'm unspeakably disappointed, Dick, but I can't say I'm surprised. All this began long ago, when you refused the priesthood."

"Oh, that's absurd, mother!" he cried.

"No, it is not," she replied without warmth. "I can't shut my eyes to the fact that God has given you very great talents, but I still maintain that to develop your talents for their own sake is to misuse them. The first false step was when you decided to devote your life to cultivating music as an end in itself instead of as a means of giving greater glory to God. All the rest, even if you had committed an actual crime, follows as a perfectly logical outcome of that conception of duty. . . . But we won't discuss that side of the matter now. I quite recognise that it is too late in the day. As I said before, your wish to give up your church work—for I don't see how you can consistently continue that after what you have said about the Cathedral appointment—only

proves the truth of my argument. . . . I wish now to point out clearly to you, if you don't already recognise them, the practical effects of what you have done. Putting on one side the question whether you have sinned, you have most certainly broken a social law which, in spite of all you may say, is founded on wisdom and common-sense. You'll have to face the social consequences."

He threw back his head and laughed.

"Forgive me, mother," he said, "but it is so funny to hear you—*you*—talking like that."

"You're quite right in thinking that what people in general may say, or even do, does not greatly concern me," she said coldly, "but do you suppose that, after this, Mr. Alemere will allow his wife to come back to him?"

"Oh, it won't rest with him," said Dick grandly; "and I sincerely hope that Evelyn won't be forgiving enough to let him persuade her to come back."

Mrs. Feddon regarded her son narrowly. Apparently he was quite honest, but she found it hard to believe that he did not see that there might be reasons why Mrs. Alemere desired her own freedom. She suggested that Alemere was not the sort of man to be contented with a negative position.

"But a man can't divorce his wife because she refuses to live with him when he ill-treats her," said Dick sharply.

"No," said his mother; "but surely you must see that the average sensual man like Mr. Alemere is

likely to infer something from the way she left home? She didn't go alone, you see."

Dick looked at her with a startled frown, and did not speak for a moment. She was glad to feel sure that the whole episode was for him on a high romantic plane, though she recognised that that made him all the harder to deal with, since he was backed up by the articles of a fanatical creed.

"Well," he said disgustedly, "if Alemere is beast enough to try to persuade people that he believes that of us there's a short way with him. He hasn't a case. I saw Evelyn comfortably settled in the lodgings and left her. I've only seen her once a day since that — taken her a few flowers and things."

"I think it's a pity, Dick," said his mother, "that you didn't come home with Mr. Umney," for the life of her she could not say "and Mr. Sherring."

"Oh, but I couldn't do that, mother," he protested, "just when she most needed companionship."

"Was it necessary to stop for the best part of a week, Dick?"

"Not absolutely necessary, of course, but— Oh, mother, I don't think we need worry about that," he said, turning impatiently away.

"It's just as well to prepare your mind for possibilities," she said. She was only now beginning to comprehend how very young he was after all.

"Anyhow," he said, as if to dismiss the unpleasant subject, "old Fairclough can give an account of all my movements in town."

"I don't think you recognise what horribly sordid places the law courts are," she persisted. "Nothing is taken for granted: you have to prove not only that you have a soul, but that you are possessed of average decency. For the first time in your life your word will go for nothing without corroboration: even the word of your friend won't help you much; your fate will depend upon the intelligence or the spite of servants. From what I can make out a great deal depends upon the woman with whom Mrs. Alemere is now living."

His look of concern did not escape her.

"I cordially dislike Mrs. Kemp," he admitted, "but I think she's loyal to Evelyn."

She could hardly say "That's just what I'm afraid of," and so she kept silence. Presently Dick laughed.

"Of course," he said, "this alters everything. This puts my back up: I don't know that I shall be very sorry if Alemere does bring an action, and I shall certainly go in for the Cathedral now, or people will think that I funk it."

CHAPTER VI

HEAVY ALEMERE took action at the end of March; Dick Feddon was pilloried as co-respondent, and, as when you drop a re-agent into a mixed solution, all his neighbours precipitated themselves out into little groups of the shocked, the amused, the admiring, the compassionate, and so on, according to their prejudices, which process they called keeping an open mind. Evelyn wrote from London, at first bravely, telling Dick not to worry. Then a tone of doubt crept into her letters—her lawyers feared she would have difficulty in disproving Alemere's charges—and finally, late one evening, Dick received a telegram, "Come to me at once."

He took the first train in the morning. After the first shock natural to a young man coming in contact with the law and policemen in their professional capacity, Dick had recovered his spirits and was in a fighting mood. No man, least of all a young man, unjustly accused can help feeling a bit of a hero, and Evelyn's telegram with its note of helplessness and distress lifted him to the height of enthusiastic tenderness. He reached Sidney Gardens where, more bright for the sooty houses, there was already a misty green veil of lilac buds and a shimmer of

crocus flames in the quick March weather, at twelve o'clock. The little glass-house of the florist at the corner of the Gardens was golden with daffodils, and Dick stopped his cab and alighted, filling his hands with the symbols of unconquered hope.

Mrs. Kemp received him with open admiration but some surprise. "I don't think Mrs. Alemere expected you quite so early," she said, and suggested that he came back in an hour's time; but Dick was inexorable, and claimed instant admission to Evelyn's presence.

"You'll find her very much upset, Mr. Feddon," said Mrs. Kemp. "I don't believe the poor lamb has slept for a week. If you'll excuse me saying so, I don't think you ought to leave her for so long again." Which only increased Dick's impatience, but possibly served purposes he did not suspect. Mrs. Kemp seemed anxious to keep him downstairs, and sat talking rapidly but as if she were listening for sounds from the other part of the house. When at last she took him up to the drawing-room they met a palpable breakfast-tray coming down. Mrs. Kemp called Dick's attention to the pathetically small attempt her lodger had made upon the eggs and bacon, checked the servant's surprised explanation, and, all in a breath, rated her soundly for slackness in clearing away. She eyed him anxiously as the maid bumped past them with the tray under his nose, and was about to enlarge upon the tonic virtues of brandy in tea, but bit her thin lips and coughed when she saw that he had noticed nothing.

She delayed him on the landing while she talked about her difficulties with servants.

"If there's one thing that annoys Mrs. Alemere," she said, "it's to have meals left about. It's a shame, too, because she's so kind and considerate, and always has her breakfast in the drawing-room to save that lazy cat trouble."

Almost maddened by her wheedling gossip, Dick answered at random, until the door was opened by Evelyn herself.

"Oh, Dick, I'm so glad to see you," she said, leading him into the room.

He stood looking at her, anguished by the ravages of grief and anxiety on her appearance. She looked older and less dainty, heavy-eyed, and with her hair in disorder. For one moment he was disappointed and repelled, but the next a wave of pity and tenderness rushed over him, and with an uncontrollable impulse he held out his arms. She came to him with pretty hesitation, flushing, and hiding her face against his coat. She suffered his reverent kiss with tightly closed lips, and turning her head aside. He thought he understood the reason for her delicate reserve, but she murmured, "I've got a bad cold coming, and I don't want you to catch it;" an explanation which, he knew not why, seemed in bad taste, and he released her from his arms. She took a chair as far away from him as possible, and began to talk rapidly, while furtively arranging her dress which he was not experienced enough to know had been hastily flung on.

"When did you get my telegram, Dick?" she asked. "I expected you last night, but as you didn't come I thought you couldn't possibly be here until three o'clock to-day. I forgot the early train —you must have started without breakfasting."

"Oh, never mind that, dear," he said with tender impatience, feeling that all explanations were unnecessary now that they were together. "Tell me about yourself: you look as if you had suffered terribly."

"It's about you I'm worrying, Dick," she said, more truthfully than either of them understood. "I am to blame for dragging you into this awful scandal. But I never thought he would so misunderstand us," she continued, beginning to cry. "He is hasty and violent, but whatever he thought about me he might have known you better."

"Oh, I'm not sorry he has taken the gloves off," said the boy grandly. "Until now our hands have been tied by a hundred little considerations. I had to be careful not to compromise you, and I did not like to tell even my mother how badly you had been treated. But since he has not scrupled to drag your name in the dirt, the world shall know the whole truth about him. He brings it on his own head, and I shan't spare him—unless, of course, dear, you wish me to hold my tongue for the sake of old times."

"There never were any old times," she said tearfully; "my marriage was all a horrible mistake from the beginning."

"And how nobly you have borne it," he said fervently. "Of course, you could not hide the truth from me—I saw at once that you were desperately unhappy—but nobody else seems to have guessed."

She glanced at him over her handkerchief.

"But they know he struck me?" she asked, almost peevishly.

"My mother knows," he answered, betraying the only person that mattered for him.

"What did your mother say, Dick?" she asked in a shamefaced manner.

"My mother's ecclesiastical prejudices are rather pronounced," he said, with an apologetic laugh and flush; "and I'm afraid she thinks we're very unconventional; but of course now that things have got to this stage she'll be on our side."

"I'm afraid it'll do you a lot of harm in every way," she said; but he laughed her fears aside. He was big enough to bear worse blows; and, besides, Alemere was certain to be defeated. For the matter of that, why shouldn't she turn the tables on him? Surely a woman could free herself from the brute that struck her.

She shook her head, and explained the inequity of the law. He cried shame upon it. Hadn't Alemere been false to his marriage vows to love and honour her? She agreed with his idealistic notions, but was a little impatient with his contempt for facts.

"You know, Dick," she said, her voice sounding thin and shrewish, "we are in a tight place. All the prejudices of a jury will be against us."

Still he reviled the law and the absurdity of custom. A man and woman couldn't take a railway journey and a meal together without being dragged into court to prove their innocence. It was shameful, and screamingly funny at the same time. He protested so much that her lurking vanity was aroused. His high-spirited contempt for juries argued an insensibility to herself. She was too far from seeing the end of her perplexities, too careful of her resources to have given way to him now if he had pleaded, but she was hurt that he did not plead. She would have liked the privilege of denying him. He was so disconcertingly unlike any other man she had ever imagined: she half despised him, yet he piqued her horribly and aroused her provocative instincts. There are women who if they were about to be hanged would try to stir the hangman's pulses. At last her irritable nerves could bear it no longer.

"Anybody would think, Dick," she said, "that I am too unattractive to tempt any man."

He was on his knees at her side in a moment. "Don't, dear, I implore you," he whispered. "You know I daren't think, even." She suffered her hand to rest for a minute on his thick hair, smiling at her power as he shivered under her touch.

"You've got to remember, Dick," she said, a little flushed, and looking down with adorable shyness, "that all the probabilities are in his favour. Juries don't believe in angels;" she lightly touched his forehead with her lips. "We know:

they suspect. The whole thing must be fought on proof and counter proof."

"But he can prove nothing," he said.

She was silent, and he was seized with apprehension. Her opinion seemed to tally so exactly with his mother's. He was young enough not to care what happened to his material affairs, but he was proud of his own name, and the thought that he might be the means of dishonouring Evelyn's was torture to him.

"But we've got Mrs. Kemp to speak for us," he persisted, with, even at the moment, an odd sense of futility.

"They'll probably say that we've bought her," she answered; and the word on her lips gave him a strange feeling of aversion. He wished she had not used it, and he was suddenly conscious of all the unbeautiful mechanism of life. He rose to his feet with a sigh and looked round the room, which seemed to have suffered a subtle change since his last visit. The green rep-covered furniture looked mean and shabby, the pictures and ornaments vulgar. There was a broken-backed novel lying face downwards on the sofa, and a bunch of grapes, half-eaten, together with the empty skins, in a common glass dish on the mantelpiece. The double door leading into the other room was not quite closed, and, against his will, Dick could see the unmade bed and a skirt flung carelessly over the back of a chair. A smell of mutton-chops cooking came from downstairs, together with the voice of

Mrs. Kemp singing a vulgarly sentimental air out of a recent musical comedy. In spite of his Bohemian principles, Dick inherited his mother's fastidiousness with regard to personal surroundings, and the whole atmosphere of the place made him feel depressed and miserable. Worst of all, Evelyn seemed to have become affected by her environment. But a glance at her pale cheeks and red-rimmed eyes brought back his loyalty.

"Dearest," he cried passionately, "this is not a fit place for you. I ought not to have allowed you to come here. It is always a mistake to do things by halves, and we have gained nothing by considering appearances. I ought to have let everything go and gone right away with you somewhere into the country. We've got to defy the world, and we might just as well have defied it together and in a place where you could have lived comfortably."

"Oh, this will do for the time," she said absent-mindedly; adding, "But, Dick, have you considered exactly what will happen to me if he wins his case?"

"I say, Evelyn," he said gravely, "I wish you wouldn't talk like that. Nothing can happen to you that does not involve me. A hint of fear in you insults me. I have made myself responsible for your future."

"You cannot clear my name."

"For all right-thinking people your name will remain unsullied whatever happens."

"Right-thinking people are only a small part of the world, Dick, and we have to live in the world," she said with averted head, and following with her finger the turns in the arm of the chair. "Don't think I'm worrying about money matters," she added.

The explanation was a little superfluous and jarred upon him. Under her curiously constrained manner there was a suppressed excitement. She changed colour rapidly and did not meet his eye. Something new seemed to be coming into their relation; something more intimate, less frank and yet alluring. She was no longer for him the abstract woman in distress, nor was he the merely chivalrous squire of dames. She seemed to be clearing the ground for some new confidence: he was attracted and at the same time repelled. He came nearer to her and stood looking at her expectantly, his eyes eager, his lips parted. She did not look up, but coloured slowly and deeply from her forehead downward until her neck was dyed: it was as if he could feel her flesh tingling. Then she as slowly whitened, and when the last tinge of colour had drained away, she lifted to him a face in which the eyes were strained and haggard. She moistened her pale lips and spoke in little more than a whisper.

"Dick," she said, "will you do something very big indeed for me?"

"Anything in my power, Evelyn."

She hesitated, and then, dropping her eyes from his, murmured, hardly moving her lips and almost

as if she were afraid of being overheard by a third person—

"Need we defend, Dick?"

For the moment he was taken aback, and she saw it, and the recognition gave her an odd mingling of relief and resentment: resentment because he did not jump at the opportunity implied in her request, relief because his hesitation justified her obscure motives and uncertain thoughts about the future. She was not of a sort to lay deep plans or premeditate treachery, but she knew that she could not be answerable for herself beyond to-morrow. One thing only she wanted for the moment, and that was freedom: what she should do with her freedom even she did not know, and in spite of the intimate relation in which they had been placed by their own choice it did not strike her subconsciousness as inevitable that her future must be involved with his. That, however, was what came to him with a sudden illumination, and he sprang forward and seized her hands.

"Evelyn!" he cried in a quiver of emotion, "what a contemptible cad I am to leave you to ask that. Ah, now I understand your worry and anxiety: I could kick myself for leaving you with a single particle of doubt in your mind. . . . But don't be too hard upon me; the idea never entered my head," she winced a little at his candour, "because I did not dream that you would go through so much for me. I've no right to allow you; but I can't refuse, now you have said it."

This, as she afterwards saw clearly, was the moment she ought to have chosen for candour; but just because her own intentions were so miserably obscure the opportunity passed and she said nothing.

"How it clears away everything at a blow," he said, moving excitedly about the room. "What does it matter now what he or anybody else says or does? Let them jabber; let them prepare their little plots and coach their witnesses and fill up their counsel with Mother Grundy platitudes. They can scrape the gutter, and when they've got the mud bucketed and ready to shy, we turn round and say, 'We are willing to take it as thrown, and prefer to keep our clothes clean. Think what you like: we appeal to another tribunal.' And then," he continued more soberly, "we can come to each other knowing that we have paid in full beforehand; that we have climbed and not slipped."

For the time his enthusiasm infected her, and she was ready to believe herself committed to him. If she had been capable of praying she would have prayed for courage. She was either not honest or not hardened enough to play the part she needed. For him the hour begun in vague depression ended in glory. The sordidness of the room was redeemed: Mrs. Kemp was only a necessary super in the beautiful comedy of their love. He could chuckle over Evelyn's intelligence just because he did not know its extent.

"What pleases me most, next to the thought of you," he said, "is that we can now drop dodging and

contriving. . . . Let us flaunt ourselves in the sun, Evelyn; let's air our guilt and give the poor dears something to talk about. Evelyn," he cried, his eyes dancing, "I should like to walk arm-in-arm with you down Piccadilly, and if we could only meet the Dean my happiness would be complete."

He ran on with absurd suggestions. There came into her mind the little acrimonious thought that the one obvious advantage to him of their decision did not seem to occur to him. Again, it was not that she was in the least danger of surrendering herself; she was voluptuous as a means and not as an end: but she could not help reflecting that with most men delight would have expressed itself in some more intimate way than the wish to astonish their neighbours.

"Let's go out to lunch," he said presently; "where shall we flaunt it? We ought to pick the most abandoned place in this great city. Quick!" he cried imperatively, clapping his hands, "go and get your brightest things on: if you have a touch of scarlet, all the better. Nobody shall say that we don't play the game."

As she was leaving the room her eyes fell on the daffodils, which he had laid on the little table when he came in. She picked them up, and holding them against her lips with a murmured "Thank you, Dick," carried them into the bedroom.

While she was dressing he seated himself at the piano and played wild improvisations, calling through the half-opened door the ideas they were supposed

to illustrate. Evelyn reappeared in a wonderful gown that made him think of pot-pourri. Round her neck was a slender square-linked golden chain set with amethysts. She had powdered her face to remove the traces of crying, and this, with the colour and fragrance of her person, gave her an air of delicate wickedness. When he had helped her on with her grey coat and fur, she put up her face quite simply to be kissed, and he just touched her lips with a quick sigh that told of passion held in check. At the door he stayed her for a moment, and with moist eyes murmured words of gratitude for the very great honour she allowed him. She cut him short for very shame, and with an indignant cry in her heart that Fate had cheated her. His punctilious avoidance of even the ordinary freedom of courtship, his scrupulous recognition of the tie that still bound her, made her feel that there were possibilities of happiness for her in his love which a sincerer woman would have sacrificed everything to accept.

They lunched at a place in Regent Street in the spirit of the occasion. The bright, soft weather had brought out a gay crowd of pretty women; the restaurant was full, and Evelyn observed with satisfaction that no girl of them had a handsomer companion than the laughing boy at her side. His swarthy, virile type carried off a greater freedom of voice and gesture than the sleeker, more vitiated men in the room dared allow themselves: to move impulsively and laugh freely without giving the impression of ill-breeding, a man needs to look

distinguished. Persons at adjoining tables were obviously interested in the pair: they stared at first with smiles that were a little superior, but presently bored looks gave way to good-humoured curiosity, and they laughed with them. Evelyn caught remarks; people were discussing them, and she heard an argument between two women as to whether they were lovers or husband and wife. A bet was laid, and Dick persuaded her ostentatiously to make evident her wedding-ring. He jestingly asserted that he should explain who they were; that he refused to be mistaken for anything so lamb-like as a honeymoon husband. "Haven't I got 'dangerous' written all over me?" he said. "I won't be classed with the doves."

They were attended by a beaming waiter, paternally interested. Once when Dick knocked over a glass of white wine he convulsed them by remarking indulgently, as he mopped it up, "It's only the same as water." A little thing, by the way, vexed Dick slightly. Evelyn refused to take any wine, and she expressed her objection to stimulants with rather more emphasis than seemed natural or necessary. Remembering her husband's weakness, however, Dick fancied he understood her reason and did not press the matter. On the whole, Evelyn acquiesced in his high spirits and laughed with him, but every now and again he noticed that she had sunk into a thoughtful silence, and when addressed answered absent-mindedly; coming to the surface with an effort as if she laughed and talked

rather to please him than because she felt light-hearted.

A man more experienced in affairs of the heart than Dick Feddon would have got some warning from the fact that after his first rapturous excitement had somewhat abated, his most pressing desire was less to remain in Evelyn's company than to get away somewhere by himself and think over the beautiful fact of their love. He was undoubtedly very much in love with her, but he was still more in love with love. Perhaps she divined it, for though she was not philosophical enough to comprehend that finally his happiness or unhappiness was independent of any action of hers, yet she did feel somewhat vindicated by his restlessness, and neither felt nor stated any objection to his leaving her after they had taken tea together at her lodgings. A woman utterly base, she thought, would have been more exacting. She also wanted to think. One fact assured, her freedom from her husband, she could see as it were so many miles of clear road before her, and what might lie beyond the horizon she had neither the courage nor the energy, nor indeed the wish, to investigate. It would be unjust to say that she intended deliberately to use Dick Feddon as a stepping-stone, but the knowledge of his fidelity gave her at the back of her mind a comfortable assurance, as the tight-rope walker might have of pillows,—not necessarily for use, or even to be dwelt upon in imagination, but there sure enough. All ticklish business, perhaps, demands this power of con-

centrating the mind upon the work of the moment, and Mrs. Alemere had a wonderful sense of perspective; a memory which allowed the past to die away in a nicely graduated vista and an imagination which revealed the future with a good deal of atmosphere. Only the immediate present was hard and clear, and for help in the immediate present Dick was enough.

So it was with a deep-breathing, full-voiced, grateful-eyed sense of anxiety removed that she threw herself into his arms when they said good-bye, as if she would reward his respect for her honour by surrendering more than he asked for, thus raising him to a seventh heaven of anticipation. He, as tender as any woman could have wished, yet made his farewells with an inspired preoccupation which a woman of her vanity with less to think about might have resented.

Dick Feddon was not introspective, or it might have occurred to him that strongly as Evelyn Alemere attracted him mentally and physically, the idea of marrying her was not one which would have presented itself to his unaided imagination. The suggestion may seem cynical, but it is probable that only his prejudices prevented him thinking of her in another relation. But he was still far enough from the age in which a man after bitter experiences is ready frankly to admit, what in simpler times was an obvious conclusion, that the woman eminently fitted to satisfy even the highest needs of love is not necessarily the woman to marry. The

social commonplace of one period is the recondite philosophy of another. Once presented to his imagination, however, the prospect was alluring enough; more so, perhaps, because, as is the privilege as well as the pitfall of the severely chaste, his imagination gave him shy glimpses of blisses all the more exquisite for unfamiliarity. No wonder then that he hurried back to his mother, eager to pour out his bright hopes, his great good news for her benediction and approval.

Alone in her room Evelyn Alemere re-read a foreign news paragraph in the *Morning Post* of the day before.

"Native advices have come to hand that Mr. Antony Palliser, the well-known traveller, who eighteen months ago was reported dead of dysentery on the shores of Lake Tchad, has been seen recently at Wadelai. The news, which we sincerely hope is true, needs confirmation, and H.M. Consul at Zanzibar has been instructed to make inquiries."

It would be hard to say whether at this moment Evelyn Alemere shared the hope of the *Morning Post* correspondent or not, but with all her nature she wanted to be sure one way or the other; and as she told herself again and again in the intervals of calling herself a heartless little beast, Dick Feddon was the sacrifice not to her baseness but to her harassing uncertainty.

CHAPTER VII

As we have seen, Mrs. Feddon's mind was sufficiently prepared against her son's bright and burning news. In the first stricken moment after he had told her that he had decided not to defend Alemere's action, she temporarily lost faith in her lofty theory that, given a false view of life, sins and mistakes were so natural a consequence as to be not surprising and hardly to be regretted, and bitterly blamed herself for not having warned him against the plan he so enthusiastically put before her. With less common-sense now than before, she did the worst possible thing, and shrilly reviled Evelyn Alemere; thus deepening a quarrel by putting two in the wrong. In her grief and anger she went beyond not only what was seemly, but what was probable, in any sane conceptions of Mrs. Alemere's character, or, indeed, of her son's.

"Your ruin is quicker and more certain than even I anticipated," she said with cold fury; "you begin by sapping your mind with the harlotry of art, you end by desecrating the sacrament of marriage—giving yourself body and soul to a woman who is the incarnation of harlotry. Which of you made of your sensual strummings and tinklings a deliberate

instrument of seduction I neither care to know nor intend to ask; whether you were tempter or tempted is unimportant; but I feel it my duty to remind you that this is the end. Your marriage—your coupling—with this woman will make you cease to exist for me. Don't think me melodramatic: it is as certain as that you are my son that she will drag you down to her level, and I don't wish to be a witness of your degradation."

He was stung to retaliation. Behind all her fine ideals, her talk of sacraments, was the bogey Respectability. He quoted the worldly advice he had heard of as given to young men who gave way to their passions. "Having compromised her you would have me desert her then?" he asked.

"You compromised her!" she exclaimed. "Why, a brothel could not compromise her: the woman is past staining."

"I shall not allow even you to say that, mother," he said, shaking with passion. His heat only froze her to a malignant coldness.

"There's only one thing that puzzles me in the whole miserable story," she said; "her motive. What does she expect to gain?"

"She loves me."

"Oh, you might spare that word, Dick," she said bitterly; "I love you."

Touched in spite of his anger, he made a desperate appeal at least to her charity. "You are not yourself, mother," he said, "you are shocked. I ought not to have told you so suddenly. Was there ever a mother

yet who was satisfied with her son's choice ? . . . You don't know her : won't you consent to see her ? "

"Don't be maudlin, Dick," was all she said, with a gesture of disgust. "I want you clearly to understand exactly where and how you have struck me," she continued. "Even if you were guilty of the foulness you implicitly claim, I should suffer less. Better men than you have fallen, and Christ's blood has sufficed. I have a higher trust in Him than to say that a sin is unpardonable in proportion to its coarseness. You have sinned anyhow : but in what a way ! It is your smiling, unembarrassed pursuit of the fruits of your sin that revolts me. You go sleek through it, and for the sake of the—reward, you commit perjury, you sacrifice shame, honour, decency even, not to speak of myself. There's no tragedy in it : but for shame I could laugh at you. It is a smooth and deliberate adultery. What you propose is not even a mistaken attempt at expiation ; it is a returning to the vomit. You have not even the weak man's excuse of passion : if you were passionate in this you would not have postponed your sin. . . . I am sorry that I bore you, Dick."

It would have been sheer folly to have spoken more to her in such a mood, and Dick left the house. Unwilling to cause comment by putting up at the inn, he spent the night wandering miserably about the lanes. His mother had only confirmed his devotion to Evelyn ; if he had not loved her he must be loyal to her now in bare decency : but the quarrel caused him acute suffering. The Umney children, primros-

ing in the early morning, met the white-faced, black-eyed ghost of him, and took a scared report home, so that Mrs. Umney waylaid and dragged him in to breakfast.

"Of course Charles hasn't told me anything," she said, blinking at him to express her good-natured contempt for her husband's intelligence, "but he went up to see your mother late last night and I know pretty well what's happened. You know, Dick, I think you're a fool, but as everybody's got to be his own sort of fool, your mother has every reason to be thankful."

In response to his mother's note—slipped into his hand with an air of mystery later in the day by Umney himself—"For my sake, Dick, don't be melodramatic," he consented to remain at home at least until Alemere's suit came on for hearing. Dick's punctilious obedience to his mother's wishes made him all the more defiant to the rest of the world. A spirit of revolt kept him from conceding the right of the Cathedral authorities to consider his private morals, and he would not withdraw his application for the post of organist. Mrs. Feddon, however, insisted that the Dean must be privately told of his intention to pose as an adulterer. Perhaps she still hoped something from the Dean's influence; if so, and as Dick recognised, there could be no more poignant sign of her distress than that she would allow even him to attempt what she had failed to do. Dick left the matter to his mother; what she said he never knew, but in answer the Dean wrote pleasantly

to himself asking him to walk over and have a chat. Delighted with this opportunity to cross swords with such a highly placed opponent, Dick walked over. The Deanery was on the outside of Weirminster nearest Draycote, and a walk of three miles, mainly by footpaths through pastoral country on a gusty April afternoon, was no bad preparation for the defence of young ideas. The day was a symphony in blue and white and green, with a hot sun and a west wind shepherding big white clouds, their shadows running up wide spaces of leaning emerald where lambs capered and rooks toboganned down the sky. This kind of landscape, lawny and parklike, mildly undulating, decorously free, was just the right foil to Dick Feddon's Ishmaelitish mood. He looked on the lambs with affectionate scorn; they capered as if to Cathedral chimes, demurely conscious of their destiny on Canons' luncheon-tables. Himself, he thought, might have been the Prodigal Son on an eighteenth-century tapestry fire-screen. Dick had been to the Deanery before as a guest, and he was hardly within the lodge gates before he was made to feel how far he had fallen. As he swung up the drive between flower borders that looked like celestial Sunday schools, with his head flung back and a smile of anticipation on his lips, he ran into the Dean's younger children with knitted reins and jangling bells, tightly governessed. They danced round him with "Hullo, Mr. Dick!" and were immediately called away by their slender monitress who, from under her pretty brows, gave Dick that sidelong glance of con-

demnation which most approves. He could hear the children's indignant questions as they were led by hand down the drive. When he had been admitted to the house no ladies were visible. This caused him nothing but amusement: he wished he had the assurance to ask the Dean if it was their virtue he misdoubted. If he had met Mrs. Maidment he swore he would have ogled her.

The Dean came out of his study humming the concluding motive of Tschaikowsky's *Symphonie Pathétique*; he frowned and shook his head as he ended with "Br-r-room!" on the dominant, while he pressed Dick's hand.

"That's how it all ends, my boy—despair, despair. . . . How's your mother?" he said all in a breath, but with a change of tone indicating the difference between that sullen gloom which might be expected to follow Dick's unhindered pursuit of the beautiful and the Christian serenity associated with his mother's name.

Dean Maidment was a handsome, ruddy, clean-shaved, athletic-looking man, with a kindly-humorous blue eye, a portentously solemn mouth, and a voice which suggested a great deal of suppressed human nature. He was suspected of more than one race-meeting, and it was known that he had supped with variety actresses since his preferment. He liked to begin a sentence with "Kid McCoy told me," or "It was when the Navarrete was dancing at the Empire." His manner to religious doubters implied a sympathetic "I know, I know,"

and he encouraged newly ordained curates to read the heavier sceptics—for recreation. Evelyn Alemere said that Renan was always kept in the Deanery nursery between Grimm and Andersen, and that the Misses Maidment sat upon two volumes of Harnack to practise their scales.

The Dean led Dick into his study and offered him a whisky-and-soda. The Dean's library resembled an ecclesiastical gamekeeper's larder, the volumes most in evidence being works of heretical and infidel philosophy, together with the more notorious of those imaginative writings which are popularly supposed to have an immoral tendency. It was the Dean's habit to discuss them pleasantly, as a bacteriologist in a holiday mood would show schoolgirls his cultures of deadly micro-organisms. He once quoted three pages of d'Annunzio, with enthusiastic appreciation of his art, in a Lenten sermon. Casanova, he said, was the greatest moralist that ever lived. With great tact he respected the more personal details of Mrs. Feddon's confidence, and merely pointed out the embarrassment of his own position.

"I understand from your mother that you have decided to throw up the sponge in the lay court, but that you claim privilege with regard to the Chapter," he said. "Under these circumstances, of course, we can't consider your application for any post in the Cathedral, but before I do my official duty I should like to give you the chance of taking it out of my hands."

This was just the opening Dick had hoped for. He had recently improved his ecclesiastical history, and now reminded the Dean of certain endowments. He had at his finger-ends the private and commercial misdeeds of the contractor who within living memory had added the south spire.

"I don't notice, Mr. Dean, that the stones exude the blood of widows and orphans," he said; "but perhaps you have used whitewash?"

The Dean smiled tolerantly upon his impertinences.

"Yes, yes," he said. "I could put much bigger weapons into your hands than that." He made his little joke. "It is the race between big guns and armour-plate, you know. Every time the enemies of the Church invent a more powerful weapon, she produces more efficient armour. . . . But don't misunderstand me, my dear boy," he continued, "I don't propose to take you out of your depth just now. I am speaking to you now merely as a man of the world. From a purely professional point of view this appointment would be a big thing for you, and your failure to obtain it will seriously affect your material prospects. If you withdraw, nobody need know why you have done so; but if we bar you, you are implicitly condemned—your license is endorsed, so to speak; and as a friend and admirer of your dear mother, I don't like to feel that it is I who condemn you. Now, can't you see your way to taking the initiative? it is only a matter of form."

Dick suggested that if the Dean boggled at telling

the truth about his moral character, the easiest way out of the difficulty was to allow it to be supposed that the man selected to fill the post was chosen merely for his superior musical attainments. There was Mr. Joyce-Bonney for example.

"Oh, absurd!" said the Dean; "putting on one side the tampering with truth," he added more gravely. He went on to pay compliments; he spoke of the honour the Cathedral authorities felt they were doing themselves, Dick's remarkable talents, his general culture, his distinguished social qualities, his mother.

"If you please, Mr. Dean, we'll leave my mother out of it," said Dick, with his first show of feeling. The Dean bowed, and summed up his objections to Dick's proposal.

"You are the man for the post," he said emphatically. "If we appoint anyone else while you are still in the running, and don't explain why, we shall not only be concealing the truth but we shall expose ourselves to ridicule as a standard of taste."

"I'm to consider my material prospects sacrificed to defend your critical reputation, then?" asked Dick pertinently.

The Dean evaded the question by reminding him of the Laureateship. "It is something like that," he said. "The Church sacrifices a certain amount of sacred fire for a blameless record—'the brows of him that uttered nothing base,' you understand what I mean," he added hazily. "Only of course on a higher plane; since the condemnation implied in

the rejection of the morally unworthy is not a social or political condemnation but the condemnation of the Church."

Dick ventured to suggest that this showed a certain timidity on the part of the Church. Whatever experience enriched a man's emotional nature, he argued, must help his art; he took out of life with one hand what he put into his art with the other. Wasn't it the privilege and the practice of the Church to take to herself the best art procurable?

"Ah—there you are," said the Dean triumphantly. "When what a man offers to the Church is known to be ill-gotten the Church is bound to refuse it." He gave a concrete example of Eucharistic vessels.

"Well," persisted Dick, "since art undoubtedly flourishes on what the Church condemns, the only logical attitude is that of the Puritans who refused to have any truck with the enemy. Logically you ought to smash your organ and serve God in a temple not made with hands."

Then the Dean put his fingers together and prepared to be subtle.

"You have only stated a half-truth in your major premise," he said. "It is not true that lawlessness is necessary to the artist. He must be potentially a lawbreaker as he must be potentially a saint, but it is not necessary for him to exercise those potentialities."

Dick was strongly tempted to ask "Which?" but refrained. In short, as might have been expected, nothing came of the discussion, and the Dean was

left with no alternative but to advise the Chapter that Richard Feddon, Mus.Bac., F.C.O., L.R.A.M., was a person whose moral character made him unfit to take any official part in the Cathedral services.

"I'm glad your mother wrote," said the Dean as they sat smoking excellent cigarettes; "it would have been extremely painful if you were already appointed when the action came on. . . . I don't thank you, Dick, for giving us over to the tender mercies of Mr. Joyce-Bonney."

For the remaining ten minutes of the interview they talked Australian cricket. The Dean was careful not to confuse his professional and social qualities. He treated sin as a doctor treats disease, and the consultation was now over. Dick, however, was made to understand that there was a nice distinction between whisky-and-soda and tea; and as if to point his domestic disapproval the Dean himself let him out of the front door. They parted very good friends, each feeling that he had scored.

"When the stir of this unhappy business has died down, and you feel that you can eliminate personal feeling, I shall be charmed to renew the discussion—on paper," said the Dean from his doorstep. "Commend me to your mother."

Draycote had its sensation with a discomfited feeling that it was too big to take in all at once. When the news leaked out that there would be no defence to Alemere's petition there was at first a blank silence, and then a chorus of "I told you so," and "There's no smoke without fire." It is always

a relief to find that one's acquaintances are only human after all. Persons of the Sherring type said to Dick Feddon in effect, "Now we shall be able to understand one another; tell us all about it." To another section he was a devil of a fellow. The Extreme Left, the centre of Feddonism, was the Draycote High School for Young Ladies. The predisposing cause one may suppose was adolescence; the exciting cause undoubtedly was the—considering the ticklish character of the law of libel—rather precipitate action of the directors in inviting Dick Feddon to resign his duties as visiting professor of music at the end of the term. But as the Principal sadly observed to Mrs. Umney, who conveyed to her Umney's legal opinion, "Ah, don't tell me: I can tell corruption instinctively." Scoffers said that her anticipation of Dick's disgrace was an over-subtle way of flattering Mrs. Feddon, who next to the Bishop was the most distinguished patron of the institution, by giving her a chance to figure as a Roman parent. But Mrs. Feddon kept a proud silence, and Dick sent in his resignation with a flourish. Against the pernicious influence of his presence and reputation during the rest of the term, the Principal said that she relied on the healthy interests and high moral tone of her charges and their isolation from the gossip and scandal of the neighbourhood. Apparently, as several persons afterwards remarked, she forgot that Bertha Chaldecote was Mrs. Umney's orphan niece.

When Mrs. Feddon hinted to Umney that her

quarterly allowance to her son, and her existing will, were in effect a condonation of his outrageous conduct, the lawyer begged and obtained permission to try his hand at bringing Dick to reason. It is probable that Mrs. Feddon's pride in her son's unworldliness made her not unwilling that Umney should suffer the rebuff she expected. With characteristic want of confidence in himself Umney called Sherring to his aid, and a formal meeting was held, not at Umney's office in Weirminster, but in the dining-room of his house, which faced Mrs. Feddon's across the wide Draycote common. From the window and over the wych-elms the spire and battlements of the ugly Georgian Church gave a special solemnity to the proceedings. Dick came to the meeting with the bright-eyed uneasiness of a wild creature. In the dark, stuffy room, smelling of the last meal, heavily furnitured, and only brightened by Umney's indiscretions in water-colour, he moved about restlessly like a hawk in a hencoop. The two men stood so palpably for the compromises of middle-age: Sherring, with his bald, ill-shaped head, fishy-eyed stare, and straight lips tightly stretched over his prominent teeth, for its heartless materialism; and Umney, with his heavy white face and fruity voice, for its flabby sentimentality. For his mother's uncompromising ethical code, false and inhuman as it seemed to him, Dick could spare a sympathetic appreciation; but the low-voiced reverence of these men for mere money and comfort disgusted him: apparently for them the matter had

become really serious only now that his pocket was threatened. Mrs. Feddon was not present, but a deed box bearing her name lent an atmosphere. Sherring, who did most of the talking, as if he were awed by the consideration of money, was less blatantly himself than usual. His harsh voice was modulated to a persuasive murmur, and it seemed to Dick as if he were listening to a composite figure of Sherring, Umney, and his mother, with hints of the Dean thrown in.

Having with proud humility pointed out that, as Dick knew, he was not a religious man, Sherring described what he supposed to be Mrs. Feddon's attitude. He assumed that Dick looked upon his intended marriage with Evelyn Alemere as a reparation for the injury he had caused to her character and welfare: he gave him every credit for his Quixotic purpose, but pointed out that in the Church's view, and consequently Mrs. Feddon's, the only expiation possible was a spiritual process. The wrong committed could not be mended by what sportsmen would term "hedging." A divorced person was in the ecclesiastical view incapable of the sacramental benefit of marriage, and of course it was only the sacramental character of marriage that the Church recognised. It regarded the re-marriage of divorced persons as a mere evasion to reinstate them socially and legally.

"I eliminate Umney's professional prejudices," he said. "I reserve my own opinion. I don't say which point of view is better or worse: I merely state facts.

In the eye of the Church your marriage will be no marriage at all, but a state of living in sin, and therefore to continue your allowance or to allow you to benefit under your mother's will would be to countenance the evil."

Vulgar-minded persons, he admitted, might interpret this action of his mother's in another way. He felt that he ought to apologise for telling Dick, with Umney's permission, that no other person benefited by his loss. As Umney would inform him, the money would be devoted to an abstract purpose, though he was not allowed to disclose the exact details.

"Oh, please don't apologise," said Dick impatiently, as he got up from leaning against the corner of the dining-table; "the only thing that I could possibly be angry about is that you should think this piffling business of money would make any difference to my intentions. I don't happen to be angry, because I've wit enough to see that you can't understand. I don't pretend that I'm not sorry: I shall miss the money, but I'm not going to sell my soul for it."

Sherring generously intimated that though personally he believed that Dick would change his tone before he was many months older, his mother had never supposed that anything Umney or himself could say would convince him of his present folly. She had given them this opportunity, however, as a matter of form before Umney settled the business details.

Umney had shown his agitation during this

speech by walking heavily up and down the room with his hands behind his back. Dick's mind was sufficiently detached to notice that, like most sentimental persons, Umney bore his emotion ungracefully. He, like Sherring, was a long-backed man, and though he was not what could be called fat he looked unwieldy, and his large frame quivered all over every time he put his foot to the ground. As soon as Sherring gave him his opportunity he appealed to Dick's sentiment. He took him by the hand, as it were, and led him up to the shrine of stricken motherhood. Dick, with his own private knowledge of the shrine, resented this appeal by proxy, and said so rather rudely. Sherring, irritated by Umney's indiscretion, allowed the decorous composite figure to break up into its constituent parts, and spoke flatly as Sherring.

"Dick, you're a damned fool!" he said in his rasping voice. "Try to look at things as a man of the world. You're not going to retrieve your professional or social position by this marriage, and on the other hand you are seriously crippling your financial resources. I'm perfectly tolerant about the morals of the thing, and if you're sufficiently unprejudiced to figure as co. in an undefended divorce case, you needn't be squeamish either. Of course I know that you're a victim of passion and all that sort of thing, but considering what a mess this marriage will land you in—why marry at all? You'll have to clear out of Draycote, in any case, I suppose: you can live more or less where you

please, and there is no reason why you should not continue on whatever terms you are with Mrs. Alemere. Even if she brings an action against you for breach of promise it will be cheaper in the end."

This time Dick did not knock Sherring down, though he, to do him justice, was quite prepared for the blow. He was not without the courage of his cynical reputation. Just at that moment it was apparent how much older Dick was for his recent experiences. His perfect satisfaction with his own intentions left him free to appreciate other points of view, and he was magnanimous enough to recognise that Sherring's advice, if, as was rumoured, he hoped at some time to become an accepted suitor of his mother, was at least disinterested. So he only laughed, with a fine sense of superiority.

"If you understood me the least little bit, Sherring," he said, "you would not think it worth while to confess the essential beastliness of your creed. It doesn't even do you credit as a man of the world, for the first requirement of that overrated person is that he shall recognise the precise kind of fool he is dealing with. Don't distress yourself about my future; nor you, Umney. Thank you very much for your good intentions—and good-day to you."

CHAPTER VIII

THAT the high-school Principal had not accurately guaged the isolation of her charges is evident from the fact that two or three days after Dick Feddon's resignation was accepted, five girls met in a bedroom to pass a vote of indignation against the authorities, and to think out a plan for giving the new professor of music, whoever he might be, small joy of his office.

The room was Winifred Massie's for two reasons. She had started the idea of the meeting, and the window looked out on an almost impenetrable shrubbery, where even the most moonstruck undermistress was not likely to wet her slippers after dark. On an occasion like this, cigarettes are a duty rather than an indulgence, and the only way to smoke cigarettes in a bedroom without risk of discovery is to smoke them with your head out of window. Besides cigarettes there was displayed upon Winifred's bed a light repast of meringues and bananas.

Winifred was a tall, slender girl of eighteen, with green eyes, light sandy hair, and a manner of cold common-sense. She was the show pupil of the school in music as tested by examination, and in mathe-

matics by divine instinct. She had forgiven, or failed to understand, Dick Feddon's statement, reported *viâ* Mrs. Umney and Bertha Chaldecote, that she expressed her emotions in figures and did sums on the piano, and now took the chair, which was her bed. One fault as chairwoman she undoubtedly had: in spite of her own mother's secretaryship to a ladies' club she looked furtively for advice to another girl, the eldest of the five, who leaned against the mantelpiece with folded arms.

Exactly Rose Archdale's function at the meeting was not very apparent. To begin with, she belonged to the enemy, that is to say though she had been a pupil she was now an assistant mistress. She was in disgrace with the authorities, however, because the day before she had suddenly given notice to leave at Easter, and it was now three days to breaking-up. Perhaps her position of peculiar detachment suggested her presence as a sort of umpire.

Rose was tall and well-developed for her twenty-one years, and looked strong and vigorous. Her wide grey eyes had the curious expression of seeing things against their owner's will, her rather large mouth was bored-looking and almost sullen in repose. Her strikingly well-formed head gave her a look of distinction.

The other three girls, Bertha Chaldecote, May Coghlan, and Lesbia Nokes, knelt in a soft huddle on the hearthrug, in a general atmosphere of young quick breathing, hot hands, parted lips, and dewy eyes. All three wore dressing-gowns and their hair

down, and all three showed the same tendency to wriggle and clasp and whisper.

If you had seen these same girls six hours earlier in the hockey-field, braced and trim, short-skirted and small-headed, you would not have recognised them as even of the same sex. Six hours earlier, if either had mentioned Man the others would have scorched her: now, four of them, at least, shivered and whispered and flushed and protested under the domination of the idea of Man. It was their power of detachment — for it is the privilege of youth, peculiarly of feminine youth, to be and do one thing at a time to extremity—which made the Principal, with a queer misunderstanding of terms, boast of her girls as "healthy-minded." I suppose taking one's hair down has something to do with it. It is curious that when boys meet together to discuss Woman they make no effort to conceal their superiority: they raise their voices where girls would sink theirs. Each probably is a sign of fear: it being man's policy to conceal his fears, woman's to betray hers; the intention in either case being the same—subjugation.

As a result of this meeting in Winifred Massie's room, one is forced to the conclusion that if man were permitted eavesdropping on like occasions his pride would become unbearable, though he would probably learn to retain his figure and conceal his age. For it was made clear that for the young feminine imagination man forfeits his right to live at forty or thereabouts. That, no doubt, is why *Jane Eyre* was at first considered an improper novel: it was Rochester's

age and not his previous marriage which made his behaviour abominable.

During the preliminary refreshment, when the subject of the evening's debate was merely skirted, it was accepted as a matter of course that any woman was justified in leaving a stout, middle-aged man for a young and slender one—particularly if he were a Genius. That for no fault or favour. Indeed, neither then nor later in the discussion was Alemere accused of any crime other than what is ordinarily interpreted as kindness, but here unhesitatingly set down as disgusting attempts to buy that lordship over the feminine imagination which his age and figure denied him. He was fat and old: there was the sum and substance of his offence. His kind-heartedness was an aggravation, it is true; and Bertha Chaldecote's special information that he lent them the hockey-field free of charge suggested a way of punishing him, together with the dear delight of martyrdom. The issues were beginning to get confused when Rose Archdale broke in with—

"Hadn't we better take one thing at a time? I thought we were going to decide whether or not you girls were to refuse to take lessons from the new professor."

She spoke slowly, in an unusually quiet and monotonous voice, but since inflection was obtained by meaning rather than tone, the use of words carefully felt for, she left the impression of having spoken emphatically.

Bertha Chaldecote, a warm-skinned young lady of

sixteen, flushed up. She felt her importance as a link with the outer world, and Rose Archdale's treatment of her piece of news was a personal slight.

"Oh, it's all very well for you, Rose," she said tartly; "you don't learn music so you've nothing to lose, but you do play hockey."

"Well," said Rose, with an amused look, "suppose we put it to the vote at once. Shall we give up the music or the hockey? Or if you like we can toss up, so that I stand to lose with the rest of you."

Winifred Massie, after a nervous glance round, decided that she must exercise her privilege, and she called Rose to order for flippancy.

"Listen while I tell you," said May Coghlan, with the air of a discoverer; "it'll have to be the music, else how can we show our sympathy for him?"

It was noticeable that for a long time all five girls shrank from using Dick Feddon's name. They implied him with nods and blushes, "he" and "him," as if he were a necessary consequence of Mrs. Alemere's unhappiness and her husband's ineligibility. Chiefly the latter, it appeared; and in this connection Bertha Chaldecote had made a drawing of Alemere, sparing him neither years nor fatness, a horrid figure; and beneath was the legend "Kiss me." This was held to sum up the case for Mrs. Alemere without further apology, and was understood to apply not to any particular incident, but to the general beastliness of Alemere's pretensions. The drawing was handed round with a chorus of "Ughs!" and shudders.

"Poor thing!" drawled Lesbia Nokes in her velvety

Creole voice, as she studied the drawing in a sort of fascination. "I suppose she married him because he was strong: perhaps she'd seen him tame a horse."

Lesbia was a West Indian; a sleepy, warm, white girl, with dead black hair and smouldering eyes. She had the musing, reminiscent smile, unutterably wise, which later would drive imaginative lovers to jealous madness, and which means—nothing at all. Already, though she could not pass the simplest musical examination, she could curdle the other girls' blood with her violin.

"Well—he—is strong, too," protested Bertha; "my Uncle Charles says that he picked her up like a baby and carried her into the train."

"How delicious!" murmured Lesbia, closing her eyes and stretching herself luxuriously. Bertha giggled; and Winifred Massie, glancing apprehensively up at Rose Archdale, saw that she was getting cross.

"He put his arm round me wance," plaintively observed May Coghlan, who sat on her heels with her hands in her lap.

"O-oh!" came in a chorus from the other three, big-eyed and incredulous, though wishing to believe. Sternly pressed by Rose Archdale, May admitted that the occasion was a children's dance at Mrs. Umney's.

"Did you keep the dress?" asked Lesbia.

"No; what would I be doing that for?" said May, blinking at her in astonishment.

"I should have put it—no I shouldn't," said Lesbia

thoughtfully, "I should have made a sachet out of the stuff where his arm had been, and filled it with rosemary, and kept it for ever."

Rose Archdale, who was plainly getting restive, acidly asked when they were going to begin the debate.

"The difficulty is," said Winifred Massie in a business-like tone, "how are we going to let him know what we are doing for his sake?"

"We could write and tell him—I'd take a note," said Bertha eagerly.

"I don't want to discourage you," said Rose, eyeing her coldly, "but he might consider that an impertinence. What I want to know is this: have any of you girls ever spoken to Mr. Feddon?"

At this they broke out into satirical cries.

"Shows what you know about him," they said. "He doesn't give you a chance. . . . I'd like to see the girl that would have the cheek to speak to him. . . . He makes you sit and shiver. . . . He doesn't seem to know you're there. . . . And then the way he pushes you from the piano, and then blushes and says, 'Oh, I beg your pardon.' . . . Isn't it lovely, Lesbia?"

"Once," said Lesbia luxuriously, and the others turned eagerly to her, "he was going over my harmony,"—here they smothered a laugh, at which Lesbia merely blinked good-naturedly,—"I had hold of the paper, and his hand touched mine. He looked as if he was going to say something, but Miss Legg was there, and all he could get out was 'Sorry, Miss

Nokes,' in such a tone. When I got outside the door I said 'I'm glad,' out loud."

Rose Archdale, who for all her apparent unconcern had betrayed by her breathing that she was listening intently, smiled and turned to Winifred.

"It's getting late," she said; "hadn't we better decide what we're going to do?"

"How would it be to write to her?" suggested Bertha.

"Yes; that would be lovely," agreed the other three. Rose was silent.

"Well, what do you think?" asked Winifred Massie, turning to her. Rose was not immediately ready with her answer, and the others fell to discussing Mrs. Alemere with enthusiasm. Their loyalty to the Chosen, without a spark of jealousy, was curious, and implied a sort of freemasonry of sex, suggesting that the Oriental view of woman's place in the Cosmos is based upon something deeper than merely local custom. Mrs. Alemere, the girls agreed, was simply sweet. Their chief opportunity for observing her seemed to have been in church. They spoke of her devotional air, her sad mouth, soft dresses, and the delicate perfume she used. Lesbia had seen her crying during the voluntary, as she knelt with the coloured light falling on her. May Coghlan said that she made you think of Launcelot and Guinevere and Paolo and Francesca. "Her voice," she said, "has a thrill in it, and gives you cold shivers up and down your back."

Bertha mysteriously hinted that her Uncle Charles

thought that Mrs. Alemere was misunderstood. "Do you know," she murmured, "I believe he's a bit in love with her himself."

"Who wouldn't be?" they protested in chorus. Rose Archdale alone kept silence, and under pressure admitted that she hadn't thought much about Mrs. Alemere. "But then," she said, "I don't understand it."

"Don't understand what?" they demanded.

"Well, him and her." This was not clear enough, and she had to explain that while she did not deny Mrs. Alemere's prettiness she couldn't understand why Dick Feddon had run away with her.

"Wouldn't you run away with him if he asked you?" cried Winifred Massie.

"Would you?"

"Wouldn't I!" was the answer: "And so would I" in chorus from the others. Then the question of right and wrong came up, to be settled by the decision that it didn't matter if she loved him. This necessitated a definition of "love," which in conclusion seemed to resemble Chopin's Twelfth Nocturne by moonlight to the accompaniment of ice-cream. A raid upon the meringues followed, until Winifred Massie, under fear of Rose, implored the others to continue the debate. She failed to gain the attention of May Coghlan and Bertha Chaldecote, who were whispering.

"You haven't," said May: "I'll swear I have," retorted the other. Sternly called to order, Bertha begged May not to tell, but in a tone that implied

that the offence would not be unpardonable. So understanding her, May gave it out impressively that Bertha Chaldecote had Dick Feddon's photograph. This nailing of things down to the concrete drove the last ideas of debate out of everybody's head.

"Did he give it to you?" they asked; and now that she was so far committed, the temptation proving too strong, Bertha nodded "Yes." May's and Lesbia's arms were sympathetically round her: she was looked upon with awed eyes and tended like a bride. She implored them not to let anybody, particularly her aunt, know; and they assured her, with kisses, that her secret was safe with them. Until the voice of Rose Archdale broke in with, "I don't believe it."

The arms dropped from Bertha, and there was a momentary silence followed by a perfect babel of protestations. In the midst of it May Coghlan, shaking her hands before her, cried out, "Will you be quite!" and suggested that the photograph should be produced. Bertha's maidenly reluctance to respond to the challenge for a moment shook their faith in her, but she finally gave her consent. "If you'll give your solemn word of honour that you'll never, never tell anybody." Betrayal, she opined, might make trouble between the lovers. After that they were inclined generously to take Bertha at her word, but Rose demanded the photograph. When the flood of expostulation and sympathy was at its height, and the risk to herself evident to all intelligences,

Bertha got up from her knees, and, turning to Rose, said—

"Well, will you believe if you see it?"

"I'll believe you've managed to get one of Mr. Feddon's photographs," said Rose ungenerously. Without deigning to answer her, Bertha slipped out of the room and padded along the passage. During her absence Rose had a bad time, and Lesbia Nokes frankly told her that for her part she was sorry she had been invited to the conference.

"There isn't any," said Rose, "and I don't see what we're here for."

"Oh, to talk about Dick Feddon and imagine his arms round us," asserted Lesbia unblushingly. They pounced eagerly upon Bertha on her return; even Winifred Massie forgot her official importance and linked arms with the other two as they leaned over the photograph.

"'From Dick to Bertha,'" read out Lesbia reverently; "how simply sweet."

"May I look?" asked Rose, in a constrained voice. The photograph was coldly handed to her. She examined it narrowly: Bertha, it might have been observed, looked embarrassed.

"You've just written that," said Rose, and to the despair of the others Bertha remained silent.

Rose laid down the photograph on the mantelpiece, and with slow, carefully picked words, lashed them.

"I wonder what Mr. Feddon would think of us," she said. "From what I can make out he's never

spoken a word to any of you except about lessons, and no wonder. Imagine the imbecility of trying to make love to a man when he's at work! You might as well offer a dog primroses when he's got a bone. Yet you slobber over his name as if he was a man in an opera with fat legs in velvet tights. You keep his photograph—which you bought at Snell's for half a crown, and I suppose you know, Bertha, that a photographer who sells a photograph without the sitter's permission gets into an awful row——"

"Well, it was in the window, and I told the man I was sure he wouldn't mind," said Bertha, on the point of tears.

"—and keep it in a drawer," went on Rose, disregarding her, "like men collect pictures of half-undressed actresses. It's simply beastly! As for Mrs. Alemere, she's just a waster, and it'll serve Mr. Feddon right if she runs away with somebody else, though that's no business of ours. I thought we were going to have some fun. You all professed to be so jolly angry about the injustice done to Mr. Feddon,—if it is an injustice,—but from what I can make out you're angry, just as a man might be angry because a pretty barmaid was sent away from the public-house he goes to. Ugh! I thought you were going to be sportsmen, but you've none of you got the pluck of rabbits. Well, Winifred, thank you very much for the supper, and I believe it isn't your fault, really.—Don't be afraid that I'm going to split, it's all too disgusting!"

Before anybody could think of a suitable repartee, her soft slippers were heard thumping along the passage.

There was an uncomfortable silence. Lesbia Nokes yawned and smiled.

"Let's look at the photograph again, Bertha," she said, stretching out her large, firm white hand.

"Oh dear," she sighed, "just fancy running your fingers through his hair."

May dug her sharp chin into Lesbia's soft shoulder.

"Oh, he's a darlin'," she said.

Winifred turned round ill-temperedly.

"I told you how it would be," she said. "I knew Rose would go off in a huff if we didn't stick to the point."

"Oh, who's carin'?" asked May. "She's all contrariness these days."

"Well, for goodness' sake," said Winifred petulantly, "let's get something done. Suppose we write a round robin to the Principal?"

May Coghlan expressed her keenness for anything in the shape of a shindy; but Lesbia, laying aside the photograph, observed—

"Don't you think it would be as well to wait and see what the new professor's like? He might—" and she smiled luxuriously.

After a momentary outbreak this was held to be sound good sense.

"You see," said Bertha timidly, "we've nothing against him, and we don't want to hurt his feelings

before we've seen him. Besides, he might have a moustache."

It was noticeable that, beyond Lesbia's purely artistic criticism of her invention, Bertha was not condemned.

"What I don't understand," said Winifred, "is the way Rose is down on Mrs. Alemere. I thought she was always sticking up for women being independent and living their own lives."

"Oh, she gets that out of her father's novels," said Lesbia. "I read one once, but I couldn't understand much of it. Awfully dry: only two kisses all through the book."

"But I should have thought," persisted Winifred, who was proud to be Rose's confidante, "that she would have said 'Bravo!' to any woman who took her life into her own hands, like Mrs. Alemere."

"Mrs. Alemere hasn't," said Lesbia, smiling enigmatically.

"Anybody," said Bertha, with demure slyness, "would say that she was jealous."

Lesbia got up, put back her heavy, dusky hair, approached the bed, and with slow discrimination selected a meringue. She ate it luxuriously, licked the last fragment of cream from her pale red lips, and observed—

"Well, you girls are very slow. Why is Rose leaving so suddenly? Can't you see that she—Oh, never mind."

CHAPTER IX

During his last week at home Dick had to put up with a great deal of sympathy from persons who agreed as to the propriety of his disgrace and the necessity for safeguarding their womenfolk from his influence, but thought it hard lines that he should be hit in the pocket. They condoled with him as a man who had had an unfortunate accident.

"Women," they said to him in confidence, and including both Mrs. Alemere and Mrs. Feddon in their meaning, "are the very devil." Alemere was roundly condemned. Of course he was bound to get rid of his wife now, but he ought to have looked after her better all along; but for discretion any husband or brother of them might have stood in Feddon's shoes. Alemere ought to have been more careful whom he married: his wife was not a Draycote woman, but came of a loose-living writer and painter set in London, and some of her relatives were Roman Catholics. But all Draycote agreed that the scandal would be wholesome discipline for Mrs. Feddon.

Immediately after Alemere had obtained his decree *nisi*, Dick went to London. The complete havoc to his worldly affairs in Draycote, and the necessity for prompt action, kept his mind from brooding over the

quarrel with his mother, and they parted with the greatest civility. Out of all Draycote only Mrs. Umney, florid and self-possessed, managed to be at the station in time for the early train. She gave Dick a casual "good-morning" on the platform, and busied herself with time-tables until just before his train started, when she looked in at the window with her sleepy smile.

"You're paying us a tremendous compliment, Dick," she said.

"Us?" he asked.

"Well—we women generally. I wish it had been a little later, when you had made quite sure that there was nobody else." She held out her hand as the train moved, adding, "Good luck. Write to me—Charles is dying for a new emotion."

Until his affairs were more settled Dick stopped with Fairclough at Notting Hill. Evelyn Alemere's wish that he should not come to see her too often during their six months' probation did her every credit as a woman and as a prospective wife.

"I suppose we have broken the laws—at least, in intention," she said, during their first lovers' walk on a May evening, down the green lane past Holland Park which exactly suited her pretty air of sham rusticity; "and if the truth came out they could cheat us of happiness even now; so until I am formally set free we ought to consider ourselves on parole, and not even an engaged couple. From our point of view, the law has given us a privilege and not a punishment. And there's another reason why I'm glad that we can't be married at once," she continued

tightening her hold on his arm as if to imply that but for the legal impossibility she would not have waited, "I want you to have your mind free for your work; I want to see you quite comfortably started in London, because I should hate to feel at any time that I was a drag on you."

She hinted that when he got rooms of his own she would like him to settle in quite another part of London. "For the look of the thing—because we're not going to admit that we're outside respectability and so we've no need to run risks of scandal. Also, because it pleases me to think that you must make an effort to come to see me—you haven't courted me yet; and then, you know," she continued, dropping her eyes with a sigh, "I'm damaged goods, Dick, and I want—no, I don't want—but I ought to give you every opportunity to change your mind. I don't want to feel that you are taking me out of generosity."

Dick's answer need not be recorded. The only point in her behaviour that did not completely satisfy him was her unwillingness to refuse Alemere's allowance, which he offered through his solicitor.

"That's commonplace," she said, opening her eyes in sincere wonder. "Aren't we going to prove that we are as sane as the rest of them? Why should they have the laugh of us? I expect they're all eager to see that you have tied yourself to a useless encumbrance. I know I wasn't notorious for management or any other of the domestic virtues before, but it will be just my vindication to prove that I possessed the virtues all along in reserve for a suitable occasion—which is you. Oh I can be very

economical—actively economical, which isn't making a virtue of necessity, but the natural function of a woman contented and at peace with herself. You're not so absurd as to be jealous of him, are you, Dick? Don't you see that really it is a sort of indemnity for having misjudged us?"

Finally she gave in to his wish, though it was evident that she still thought him unreasonable; and with a sigh he consoled himself with all the generalities he had ever heard about the difference between a man's and a woman's code of honour.

Fairclough advised him to settle in Camden Town. "They're not so particular in a neighbourhood like that," he said; "though even there I expect you'll find your Mus.Bac. and your F.C.O. rather a nuisance than otherwise, because mamma reads the Sunday newspapers. Unless you change your name?—well, don't be angry," as Dick hotly refused, "only you mustn't expect to get the same sort of pupils that you've been used to. However, you ought to find enough of a sort in Camden Town to keep you going. All the last crop of the Board Schools; butcher's, baker's, bank-clerk's, insurance-agent's daughters—the raw material of the Factory. Don't despise them; they're in deadly earnest."

Jim Fairclough was a big, bushy-haired man with an inflamed face and a carefully waxed grey moustache. He had begun life in a cotton-mill, and with old age had adopted the Quakerish dress which is still characteristic of prosperous Manchester; broadcloth, a wide shirt-front and a narrow black bow.

Dick took him to tea with Evelyn on a Sunday

afternoon, and was disappointed to see that the two were not going to be friends. Evelyn was not at ease, though she did her best to be charming; it seemed as if she wanted to conciliate Fairclough, but he remained impassive and spoke in monosyllables. Evidently he regarded Evelyn as a hindrance to Dick's career, though the only hint he let fall was when they were walking away from Sidney Gardens.

"Pity you had such a respectable upbringing, Feddon," he said. "If you'd really had to work for your bread and butter you wouldn't have had leisure to fall in love. However, in a way I'm not sorry; if you had got the Cathedral berth you would have been a sort of his Grace's own particular private drum, and written cantatas. You wouldn't have had the chance to know what stuff you are made of, because you would have been taken for granted on the strength of your degrees and your position. Now you've got to make your way by sheer music, like any fiddler. The thing I regret most of all is that you've missed such a fine chance of a band. It's a band you want, Feddon, to do yourself justice. Of course you're a fine executant: yes, but there are hundreds of fine executants; the Factory turns them out by the dozen every year. You'd never get beyond a certain level as a performer on either the piano or organ; technique isn't really your forte; you haven't the right sort of patience or the right sort of vanity to become a virtuoso."

Later in the evening, when Fairclough, collarless, sat in one chair with his unslippered feet on another, he had more to say about Dick's future.

"Nowadays," he said, without removing his pipe from his teeth, "it isn't enough for a man to be a great musician: he must be a great fiddler, great Jew's-harpist, great anything so long as it's a speciality. Education means finding out exactly the one thing you get most fun out of, and success means following it up for all you're worth. Most people waste half their lives finding out not what they can do best but what they want to do. What you want to do, Feddon, is to express your temperament: to say to the world 'That's what *I* feel about this or that.' Now, besides original composition, which at present is rather a large order, there are two ways of expressing your temperament in music: on a solo instrument or on an orchestra. You are not cut out for a virtuoso, so you'll have to be a conductor. If I were you I shouldn't waste too much time over pupils: make up your mind to get hold of a band. Don't be ashamed of any beginning, however small; knock about the theatres and Strand bars, and keep in touch with any blackguard who is connected with music-halls. Take up whatever orchestral instrument you are best at, practise hard and watch your opportunity."

So Dick put up his plate in the Camden Road, bought a piano, and waited for pupils. It was at first rather a shock to learn how little his titles and reputation counted for in his new environment. He recognised the truth of Fairclough's words that until now he had lived on his reputation rather than his abilities. Fortunately these were not small, and he was adaptable, and after the first discomfiture he

found the new conditions extremely interesting. He had to adjust himself to an entirely fresh view of music. The young persons who in gradually increasing numbers came to him for lessons for the most part had little or no talent, but they seriously wanted to learn music not for its own sake, or as a graceful accomplishment, but frankly as a means of getting on in the world. They took up music as they took up shorthand and typewriting, and for the same purpose. Dick soon saw that his success as teacher meant his success in passing pupils through examinations. At first it went against the grain, but he came to appreciate the sincerity of the idea, and the intelligence and industry of most of his pupils kept him from despising them. As he said to himself, that being the game, he could play it as well as most; and the object he had in view, at least a decent professional income before he married Evelyn Alemere, prevented his mind dwelling too much on the idea of prostitution.

His orchestral instrument at the Academy had been the oboe. Again he learnt the truth of Fairclough's contention that nowadays it is not enough to be a good musician in the general sense. Not for some time did he get even a chance to play in a band. His first engagement was at a music-hall, at an hour's notice—a nightmare performance in which the character of the MS. music made him appreciate the story of the German trombonist who mistook a fly for a crotchet and "blayed him." Yet after the breathless strain was over he felt the charm of the life of these free-lances in music who, instru-

ment in hand, are prepared to go anywhere and play anything. Dick played at a dance or two, and learned to look at his own class from the other side. The strain of vagabondage which runs through "the profession" appealed to him. He began to share their good-natured contempt for those who danced to their piping. The man who plays the pan-pipes outside a penny show struck him as the true type of all artists; the man who lends himself to play upon the emotions of others, his lips tootling an air grave or gay, martial or sentimental, while his serene watchful eyes look out for the profits. We no longer hire bravoes to stab our friends in the back; we hire fiddlers to upset their moral equilibrium. See the haughty independence of the circus band. Shut your eyes and it is an essential part of the show, chuckling with the clown, melting with the voluptuous languor of the serpentine dancer: open them, and ten to one each player is palpably occupied with his own private meditations. Immediately the selection is over watch him reach for his pipe and tobacco, merely laid by. He is hired to make sport for the Philistines, and though he no longer revenges himself by pulling the material building about their ears, he seriously shakes their conception of life, letting in glimpses of wider horizons, the light that never was, enchanted airs or what not. And all the time he is thinking of, probably, beer. There is a story of a poet who with pains was captured and taken to a certain Court, feasted and worshipped. He took it all soberly and modestly, but presently escaped, and when questioned mildly answered that

it was all very friendly but that the beer was not good enough. He'd give them songs with his tongue in his cheek, but he would not lie about his palate. And the moral is—when you cage your artist don't flatter him about his work; he knows more about that than you can tell him: see that the beer is good.

To Dick Feddon, used to the flattering deference of women, the unquestioning acceptance of men of his own class, the new conditions of life had a piquant relish.

"I'm standing on my own feet at last," he said to Evelyn as he lay on the hearthrug at her feet, after she had petted and pitied him, and said what he did not recognise to be all the conventional things the situation demanded: That he was degraded for her sake; that he had given up all for her and she was not worth it. "It's the most dignified life I've lived yet," he continued. "I'm paid for what I really do: no song, no supper. It's much less embarrassing than the old way; I sell nothing of my soul. So many hours of music: so much money and no questions asked. It's nearest the old minstrel idea; the honoured guest wandering from door to door; for him the warmest corner by the hearth, the best wine, the fattest venison. I am the ruler of Destiny: I make and unmake marriages. We are playing a waltz, and the Lady Eleanor circles in the arms of her pleading lover. She is as yet unthawed, her head is her own as her feet beat in time to the rum-ti-di, rum-ti-di of the music. But by and by there creeps in a warm, whimpering note full of erotic

suggestion. That's my oboe. I'm there at half a guinea a night to—make dance music? Rubbish!—to rule Destiny. The Lady Eleanor is won, all *he* thinks by his tongue. He never gives my passionate piping a second thought. Who's the loser? Not I. I pocket my half-guinea, grumble at the quality of his liquor, go home and get roaring drunk if I like. Compare that with the old life. 'Oh, *thank* you, Mr. Feddon, I think it's so clever of you to be able to play Beethoven. Let me introduce you to Miss Manytails—she wants you to draw a pig in her book': or the church people, 'We endeavour to keep to the early tradition, Mr. Feddon; that is the form laid down by blessed Thing-um-bob.' No; give me the ten and sixpence."

He had to work very hard for small reward, but neither now nor at any time had he serious anxiety about money. At the end of a month he had the good fortune to obtain through Fairclough an engagement to direct the music at a new restaurant in Piccadilly three nights a week. The post was humble, but gave him just the opportunity he needed. By and by he introduced compositions of his own; fantastic trifles written for the purpose—a light accompaniment to choice wines and dainty food, but with just that touch of distinction to give a separate enjoyment, and wistfully, but not importunately, to remind well-fed people that they had needs beyond the satisfaction of their bodily desires. Presently the dinner-music at Paoli's began to be talked about: it became rather the fashion to dine there on nights when the band played.

So the summer passed happily for him. Evelyn seemed contented and comfortable. He was not, she said, to waste his time over her; she did not think it good that he should be dropping in at all times, but he might come always on Sunday.

"But I shall see less of you than I did at Draycote," he protested.

"Aren't you going to have me always?" she murmured, raising her dark eyes with that alluring timidity of hers, as if the choice rested with him and she feared that he might change his mind.

Seeing him only at such long intervals she was able to concentrate her power of pleasing, to keep a reserve of pretty sayings which by instinct she knew would appeal to him. She had much to tell him of her marketing, her economies, her plans. "Just like a good wife." Mrs. Kemp seemed to improve upon acquaintance: 29 Sidney Gardens, at least on Sunday, wore the look of superior domesticity.

"It needed you, Dick," Evelyn would say with a pathetic huskiness in her voice, "to bring out my true qualities. I believe my real self has got a bit stiff in the joints—but you must remember the life I've led. I know there's a part of me untouched; I go back to dim memories of my childhood which are only beginning to have a meaning for me. Oh, Dick—don't regret this time of waiting: it may be the happiest part of our lives. You know, they say geniuses are ill to live with."

CHAPTER X

On an afternoon in early August Antony Palliser rang at No. 29 Sidney Gardens, denied his name to the alert-eyed Mrs. Kemp, and entered the drawing-room with the grave assurance of the fairy prince from over the sea: and all at once Evelyn Alemere's *minauderie* fell away from her with the foolish stitching which dropped from her hands. "Be it unto me according to thy word" was never more surely written in any woman's face. There was no greeting between them; he did not speak, she did not cry out. Her arms hung straight at her sides, her eyes dropped from his and her child's mouth quivered in a little foolish smile as the colour went out of her face.

Palliser was a tall, middle-aged man, with fair grizzled hair, delicate features, and a yellow beard. A single upright line deeply chiselled between his brows accentuated the passionate intensity of his extraordinarily large eyes, terrible in their purity, that seemed to have a blue flame in them. A Frenchman had painted him as the Angel with a sword guarding the gates of Paradise: Arabs called him "the man who has seen God." His emaciated though vigorous frame was clothed in grey flannel, and he wore a red silk handkerchief loosely knotted round his throat. He carried himself very erect,

holding his head always as if he were listening to voices; he walked with swift, short steps and without swinging his arms; all his movements seemed as if in obedience to words of command.

With a gesture of intense weariness, as of one about to listen to the excuses of a naughty child, Palliser pushed aside a pile of books—and Dick Feddon's photograph was amongst them—to make room for his soft, grey hat on the little table. He waited without speaking until Evelyn was seated upright on the sofa, with her head drooping to one side and her hands clasped in her lap. Then he took a chair, passed his lean hand twice over his eyes and tugged at his beard.

"Tony," she said humbly, unable to bear the silence, "where did you come from?"

"Algiers, Florence, Paris—anywhere," he said listlessly; "but I was in England—in Hampshire—when I saw a three-months-old newspaper."

"I did not mean you to find me," she murmured, as if in apology.

"Then I thought of Archdale," he continued, disregarding her. "I remembered that his daughter is, or was, teaching at the Draycote High School. There was another girl there—niece of a lawyer. He gave me your address."

For a little while there was a silence. Palliser looked round the room with his curiously abstracted gaze which yet took in everything; a work-basket that was a nest of confusion, magazines obviously flung aside when merely glanced at, with petulance manifest in their positions on chairs and floor; music,

open at the first page, on the piano; fruit in a paper bag with wet purple stains showing through; flowers dying where they lay beside the already filled glasses, —all the incoherent litter which illustrated the spasmodic activity of a woman, not naturally idle, who had missed the purpose of her life. With perfect apprehension, but without any sign of disapproval, his eyes returned to her sitting there with her soft lips a little parted and the pulses beating in her delicate throat above the open lacework of her lilac-figured blouse. His eyes dwelt dispassionately upon the curious charm of her person: he noted the quick rise and fall of her little firm breasts beneath the soft silken stuff, the lithe grace of her shrugged shoulders and slender arms, and her fingers pressed together between her knees. There is a love which is fed upon mystery, which quickens with surprises; but there is a surer passion which, allowing its victim to measure all the attractions, to be aware of all the defects of the object, leaves him well content.

"For God's sake say something, Tony," she muttered; "beat me, strangle me—anything but look at me like that."

He was white enough under his bronze, but still he looked as if he were beginning to smile. Perhaps the saddest moment in all the sad business of a man's love for an unworthy woman is when he knows that his love is independent of respect and that he can laugh at his own weakness.

"What did you do it for, Evelyn?" he asked at last.

"I could not bear it any longer; I was going out of my mind; he struck me."

Palliser's smile was quite apparent now.

"Poor little soul," he said, and she knew that the pity of the diminutive was not for the blow or any suffering of hers. Unable to bear any longer the awful humility of the bared womanhood in her eyes, he turned away his head and his own eyes fell upon Dick Feddon's photograph. He picked it up.

"Him?" he asked.

"Yes," she said with a nod and a gasp.

He examined the photograph with maddening deliberation, pulling at his beard with his left hand.

"Looks a clean sort of boy," he said in a far-away, indifferent voice, and tossed the photograph aside.

"He is the noblest man I ever met, Tony. If there's one thing that God won't forgive me it is my sin against him. I've no right to ask you anything, Tony, but I shall ask you this: don't breathe a single word against him." She spoke in an agitated rush, while her sensitive face quivered all over with emotion.

Palliser nodded slowly: it was quite evident that Dick's personality did not greatly interest him. In spite of her abasement she was a little piqued, as if her taste were questioned, and she eagerly seized this opportunity not indeed to excuse herself, for she knew that he would only have laughed at that, but to explain what her relations with Dick Feddon really were. She spoke feelingly, but without any pretence to infatuation, of the friendship which made it seem so natural that she should turn to Feddon for help when she needed it. She was for once absolutely sincere in every word she said, and she did her utmost to make it clear to Palliser that

Feddon's character made him a perfectly safe accomplice. She spoke eagerly and quickly, with strained eyes and white face stretched forward as if her life depended on his understanding her.

He heard her out abstractedly, as if the whole subject were irrelevant.

"I concluded it was something like that from what I heard," he said; "but you have not told me the important thing. Did Feddon agree to this—after seeing his face I'm quite ready to believe that he did—out of pure Quixotry, without any hope of reward?"

She glanced at him quickly; she was still too much under his influence to lie, but she was sufficiently mistress of herself to make use of the opportunity for evasion.

"I suppose he took it for granted that I would marry him afterwards," she said falteringly.

"Took it for granted," he repeated under his breath. "Candidly, Evelyn, did you say that you would?"

"I let him believe so," she said, even now stubbornly sheltering herself behind a form of words. Palliser sighed.

"Where is he now?" he asked patiently.

Then she was frightened. "Oh," she said, looking up and with a little whimper, "you don't mean to see him?"

He hesitated for a moment, and then said gravely—

"Very well, Evelyn, I will leave it to you. But you must be honest with him and tell him the whole truth."

She looked down sullenly at her hands, muttering, "I suppose I shall have to marry him."

"Oh, that's nonsense," he said with a short laugh.

She flushed, but it could not be said that she looked affronted. She sat for a little while twisting and untwisting her handkerchief, and presently said in a low voice—

"I wish you could see how frightfully difficult it is for me: he trusts me so implicitly. He has suffered so much for my sake; he has given up everything for me. How can I be so cruel?"

"Well, you might marry him, for example."

She took the thrust without flinching, and did not reply.

"Look here," said Palliser, bending forward and clasping his hands about his knees, "supposing I hadn't turned up now, would you have married him?"

"I suppose so."

"Well then, when I came home——?"

She raised her eyes before he had finished the sentence. It was, as he recognised, no coquettish trick of hers but a mute child-like agreement with his meaning. There was no need for her to speak. His own eyes dimmed with tenderness, and he drew a deep breath, but he mastered his emotion immediately and continued in a matter-of-fact tone. "So you see, Evelyn, in sheer kindness to Feddon I should have had to prevent it. No," he said, with a flush and an impatient movement, "that's cant: it is because I want you that I insist. I let you go, once, because I was stuffed up with ideas of self-sacrifice, renunciation, and what not, but I know now that of all the poisonous lies those are the worst. If you shirk or funk or disregard the eternal

laws you are sure to get into a mess sooner or later, and one of the eternal facts is just this that we two belong to each other. I was more to blame than you in the first instance: I suppressed myself and let you marry Alemere because I thought that perhaps after all you were not strong enough to live my sort of life, and on the other hand it was quite certain that Alemere could give you all the comfort and luxury that one side of your nature cried out for. If your marriage with Alemere had been successful I should have kept out of the way now, but since the experiment came to grief I'm not going to take any more risks."

He broke off to laugh out boyishly, "Flatter myself, do I?" he said. "No, Evelyn, without humbug I do not. I don't say that it was worth while my turning up when you, like everybody else, thought I was comfortably dead and buried, but since I am here I mean to claim my privilege."

"Well, it's too late now," she said, with a luxurious pleasure in the words of despair.

"It's never too late for me, Evelyn," he said gravely, "and you know it. There's only one thing that would make me hesitate. Forgive the banality of the question and look at me:" he picked up Dick Feddon's photograph, "Do you love this boy?"

"No, of course you do not," he continued, without waiting for her answer. "But even so, if I had shed my carcase as everybody supposed I had, you could have married him without sinning. Sin, you see, is only the refusal of the right way clearly seen. Our eyes were not open when you married

Alemere, but now that every drop of blood in our bodies, every cell in our brains, sees, feels, *knows* the right way, there must be no shirking."

Every word he uttered sent a delicious thrill through her. There is no contentment, not even that of being loved, so complete as that of being understood. Evelyn recognised that Palliser took her frankly for what she was: he had no illusions about her, and if she had out with it now he could have forgiven even the infamous fact that not by accident, but with intention, she had used Feddon to leave herself free for him. She saw that for Palliser the intention was everything, and that now was the crucial moment; she must speak now or not at all. If she kept silence there would be a flaw in the very foundation of their future, yet from a mixture of perversity, vanity and cowardice, she let the opportunity go by. Seeing her tortured face, and mistaking the nature of the struggle that was going on in her mind, Palliser rose from his chair and laid his hand on her head with a gesture of infinite tenderness.

"Well," he said, "you are going to be true to yourself, little woman?"

"Yes," she gasped, with the tears running down her cheeks.

"Thank you, Evelyn," he said quietly, turning away to hide his own emotion and to let her have her cry out.

It was too late to tell him the truth now. It was all of a piece with Palliser's confident way with her that when once she had promised he did not suggest how she was to explain herself to Feddon. He either

took the responsibility himself or left it to her. It was evident that he preferred to leave it to her, not because he flinched from the task, but because her going through with it was a proof of the courage she derived from his love. Having left the explanation to her he gave her absolutely a free hand.

He only stayed for a little while longer.

"You have a great deal to go through," he said, "be brave. When you feel that you are ready to see me again write to me. I am staying in Hampshire for a week longer to finish a book. Then I shall come to London."

She wondered with a child's yearning whether he would kiss her when he left, and she felt disappointed but not angry that he did not. What in other men annoyed her, indifference to her physical beauty, in him only affected her as it deprived her of outward demonstrations of affection. It was the caress itself and not the desire it implied that she wanted. When you are sure you don't need reminding.

When she had somewhat recovered from the influence of his actual presence, Evelyn Alemere began to feel some of the irritation which a small shifty nature feels against a large single-minded one that has estimated it at more than its worth. It is sometimes a grievance to be overrated. Now that he was no longer there she could not believe that Palliser's simple direct ways of doing things were better than her own. But for her fear that "something would come out" she would gladly have left him to speak to Feddon. She herself had a great belief in *laissez-faire*, with the final privilege of wriggling at the end.

The event, anyhow, was a triumphant vindication of the principle of being prepared for emergencies: even Palliser must have admitted that it would have been awkward if Feddon had called at the same time. Those appointed Sundays for Feddon were a brilliant idea. Pondering on what she was to say to Feddon she speedily became exhausted. Why, she angrily asked, was it necessary to say anything at all? Why couldn't Palliser take her away and marry her out of hand? It was love of power, she supposed, that made him insist on her speaking: the power that is expressed in cutting-out another man was not the kind of power he prided himself on; he preferred to feel that he brought out the stronger virtues of those he influenced. She cried herself into a headache, and felt and looked so ill that when Mrs. Kemp brought in tea she was overcome with concern.

"Why, my dearie, whatever is the matter?" she said.

"Oh, for Heaven's sake pull down the blinds and shut out the sun," called Evelyn in a muffled voice from the sofa.

Mrs. Kemp's thin lips tightened. She prided herself on her power to put two and two together, but she took a voluptuous pleasure in hearing first-hand evidence, and therefore she did not resent her lodger's rudeness. She suggested a pick-me-up other than tea, but Evelyn refused it, with a curious feeling of relief that what, as she well knew, was becoming a habit and a danger was now distasteful and unnecessary. Vices are more often attempts to satisfy the higher cravings of the soul than is generally

supposed. Mrs. Kemp was too clever to ask questions at this stage: she felt pretty certain that the confidences would come in time. Mrs. Alemere could not exactly afford to hide things from her. So she busied herself in picking up the magazines from the floor and straightening their leaves.

"That was a very old friend of mine who called this afternoon," came in a faint conciliatory tone from the sofa.

"Indeed, ma'am?" said Mrs. Kemp mildly, with an inner satirical note of the moral effect of old friends. "A handsome gentleman if I may say so," she observed.

"Do you think so?" said Evelyn with more animation. Mrs. Kemp fancied she saw which way her sympathies were required.

"I don't know when I've seen a finer made man," she replied firmly.

"You wouldn't call him handsomer than Mr. Feddon, would you?" said Evelyn in a reproachful tone.

"Well," said Mrs. Kemp indulgently, "Mr. Feddon is but a slip of a boy, if you'll pardon me saying so, while Mr.——" she hesitated delicately.

"Mr. Palliser is his name," said Evelyn, sitting up and straightening her hair.

"An aristocratic sounding name."

"It is a nice name, isn't it?" said Evelyn; "but so is Feddon."

"Fed'n, Fed'n," repeated Mrs. Kemp reflectively, as if she were tasting tea; "yes, but there's no stay in it: it's sudden and eager, here to-day and gone to-morrow in a manner of speaking."

"Well," said Evelyn decisively, "it's going to be my name before very long."

"So I took the liberty of supposing," said Mrs. Kemp drily, "and I'm sure I congratulate you with all my heart. Mr. Feddon is a perfect gentleman, that I will say, and very free, and a beautiful musician. It's always a treat to me and Alfred when he comes here: we sit with the kitchen door wide open. As I said to Alfred last Sunday, Mr. Feddon is never so happy as when he is at the piano; it seems funny to think of him getting married, because he seems to want nothing else in the whole world besides his music. I should say he would be in great request at balls and parties: people like to have nice-mannered performers at their entertainments. I had a cousin myself who married a gentleman that played the clarionet: she was parlour-maid where he came to a dance, and he proposed to her at supper in the housekeeper's room. They might have done very well but that he had a weakness for the drink, which I understand is the way with professional gentlemen. Have you noticed, ma'am, that piano-tuners always smell of drink?"

The woman spoke artlessly enough, yet Evelyn could not but feel that some vague disparagement of Feddon was insinuated. Mrs. Kemp sidled to the door and then hesitated.

"If I might ask, does Mr. Palliser play?" she asked.

"No, he is not a musician," said Evelyn, rather shortly.

"Not that I thought so," said Mrs. Kemp; "he gave me the impression of being a gentleman of means."

Evelyn coloured.

"I don't know anything about his means," she said, wishing now to cut short the discussion; "I believe he is comfortably off, but he travels a good deal."

"I don't like a man that's always about the house," affirmed Mrs. Kemp stoutly.

"Anybody would think that Mr. Palliser was coming to live here," said Evelyn, with a nervous laugh; adding, "I've known him since I was quite a girl: he must be getting on for fifty."

"And have made up his mind, I should say," said Mrs. Kemp, feeling that she had learnt and said enough for one day. "Excuse the liberty of my asking, ma'am," she said from the door, "but shall you be always at home to Mr. Palliser?"

"Why, certainly," answered Evelyn, staring at her.

Mrs. Kemp dropped her eyes and smoothed out her apron.

"I like to know beforehand," she observed, "and I was wondering whether perhaps you'd prefer to have your Sundays quiet." She raised her eyes with the last words. Evelyn gave her a miserable glance.

With a horrible feeling of degradation she appreciated the impudence under the woman's careful respectfulness, the sly significance of her knowing asides and artless illustrations. Mrs. Kemp, with her demurely folded hands, round white face and primmed lips, had all the air of an accomplice. "You and I understand one another," she seemed

to say. Evelyn began to recognise the weakness of her methods, but it seemed safer to continue them.

"Well, perhaps on Sundays—" she began, with a fine appearance of indifference. Mrs. Kemp nodded and smiled.

"Say no more, Mrs. Alemere," she said, lowering her voice confidentially; "you can trust to my discretion."

After she had closed the door Mrs. Kemp ran lightly downstairs. She cake-walked across the kitchen, where sat her husband in his shirt sleeves looking at a paper illustrated with portraits of theatrical beauties.

"I hope you'll be better in the morning," he observed, with mild sarcasm. She delicately removed the paper from his hands with the toe of her shoe.

"Wake up, Alfred, and attend to your lawful wife," she said.

Alfred was a heavily-built person, clean-shaved, with a big blue jaw, and a short, strongly-hooked nose. He had a loud, abrupt, bass voice, imperfectly managed, as if for some reason he had only recently been allowed the full use of it, and a manner of great solemnity.

"Well, what is it?" he asked, rather testily. Mrs. Kemp went to the dresser drawer and took out a carefully folded *Morning Post*. She followed one column after another with her forefinger, while her husband watched her with ill-tempered admiration. Presently her finger stopped, and with the scissors which hung at her waist she cut out a very small

piece of the paper. She glanced at the date of the journal, wetted a pencil at her lips and made a note on the cutting. Then she crumpled up the newspaper and playfully wrapped it round Alfred's head. He disengaged himself with a genial oath, and looking at the heading of the paper saw that it was dated "March 7th." The gaping slit in the middle of the Foreign News column told him nothing.

"When a lady keeps a *Morning Post* in a drawer in her writing-table, and looks at the same page half a dozen times a day, you may depend upon it there's something in it," said his wife in answer to his look of inquiry.

She sat down on the wooden rocking-chair with her hands on her knees.

"Oh, she's a one'r," she said, with sincere admiration.

"Presuming the fair female upstairs?" asked Alfred; "in which case, there are others."

"Silly," said his wife with a pleased giggle.

"What's exciting you?" asked he, with the affected indifference of one who knows that he will be told only so much as is good for him.

"Dear Dick's light's put out, that's all," she said.

"Am I to understand," said Alfred, repossessing himself of his pictured consolations, "that the gallant Colonel puts in a previous claim?"

"The boy guessed right the very first time," hummed Mrs. Kemp. "'I've known Mr. Palliser ever since I was quite a girl,'" she mimicked Mrs. Alemere's voice with a spiteful laugh.

"Palliser, Palliser," said Alfred thoughtfully, as

out of an intimate acquaintance with the Services; "don't seem to remember the name."

"Oh, I don't think he's one of our sort," by which presumably she meant the circles lately honoured by her and her husband's attendance; "not dressy enough, and wears his hair too long."

"When you came down after letting him in you distinctly remarked that he had a military air," said Alfred severely.

"So I did," she admitted, "but I've been thinking him over and he's not that. I can't quite place him; been abroad for sure, but— However, that don't matter," she said, with a smile to intimate that her knowledge was exclusive. "Your little ray of sunshine says it's a walk-over for Number Two. I think that's enough for to-day, Alfred, and you can go back to your bits of frock."

"Sweet things," murmured Alfred, but whether of the actual or pictured beauties is doubtful. Just as his wife was leaving the kitchen he looked up.

"I say," he said seriously, "you keep out of it, you know."

"Well, Alfred!" she exclaimed reproachfully.

Evelyn Alemere made a feeble struggle to maintain her dignity, but the temptation to conciliate a woman who might become a dangerous enemy was too strong for her. Half-hearted even in her treachery, at first she asked for sympathy as a woman hesitating between two lovers with equal claims, and Mrs. Kemp, reading her unerringly, gave all her support to Palliser.

"Mr. Feddon is all very well as a pastime, but you can't entertain on piano playing," was her way of putting things. She undertook to prevent an accidental meeting at her house between the two men, and Evelyn knew with shame that Palliser would make no effort to see Feddon nor would he ask her any more questions. She had her moments of remorse in which it seemed easier to suffer martyrdom than to tell the truth. More than once she began a despairing letter to Palliser, telling him that she must sacrifice love to duty and humanity and marry Feddon. The letters were never finished, but the exercise gave her the feeling that she was a sorely tried woman striving to do right. Meanwhile she said nothing to Feddon. As Mrs. Kemp said—

"You can't marry either of them for nearly three months, and before then you may be guided from Above."

Dick Feddon had not learned how important it is where women are concerned to hide your likes and dislikes, though, indeed, Mrs. Kemp had stronger reasons than retaliation for taking sides against him. So long as he was presumably the law-breaker he was all very well, but as a mere prospective husband he was of no further interest and little profit. As her husband once observed, Mrs. Kemp liked "the spicy side of life." "Spiciness" is only maintained at some expense, and, paradoxically, it is the providers rather than the consumers of "spice" that pay for it.

CHAPTER XI

COMING in out of the chill air and wan sunlight of an October afternoon, a little tired and depressed from giving a lesson to an earnest but ungifted pupil in her own dreary home, Dick found a letter from Evelyn waiting on his mantelpiece. The blue-grey envelope with the curiously decorative hand-writing of the direction, beautifully spaced, even the "N.W." falling on the right spot as if to complete a design, gave him a premonition of bad news. This was Monday, and he had seen Evelyn the day before, so that she must have written either directly after he left her or quite early the next morning. He hesitated with the envelope in his hand and sat down before opening it, as if to prepare himself against a shock.

Evelyn began her letter by hoping that what she was going to write would not hurt him. He might wonder why she had not spoken yesterday, but couldn't he understand that in his presence she was not strong enough to have a very clear sense of duty? She was writing this in the cold light of early morning; by night, or when she was tired and craving for the sound of his voice and the touch of his hand, it would be impossible to write such a letter. Love had its sterner duties,

however, and she owed it to him to speak of them. She knew that he did not share his mother's narrow and cruel views, but still she could not quite rid her mind of the idea that perhaps at the bottom of his heart he thought her — she hated to write the word — "easy." Happiness between husband and wife depended so very much on the way they remembered their actual wedding, and she did not like to feel that it might seem as if they were huddling their names together because they were ashamed of them singly. She dreaded the thought that there might come a time when he would despise himself for having been weak enough to marry her. He would never be disloyal, she was sure of that, but there was just the risk that after the first novelty of possession had worn off she would seem not quite white against other women he might meet. She quoted his own words, "There's no second-best for us." Well, if it was so; but was he quite sure that he would never be ashamed of her, never try to forget the circumstances of their marriage, never hesitate to explain who she was when he married her?

Lately she had been thinking very seriously, and she felt quite sure that they ought to have an opportunity to search their own hearts, undistracted by the sight of each other. Didn't he like the Church's idea of "Retreat"? So for the remaining few weeks of their quarantine she would be glad if, at what cost to herself only her tear-wet pillow knew, he did not come to see her at all. For herself, she

should regard this period as a vigil. His occasional letters would be a source of comfort and strength to her, but he must not be disappointed if she did not write.

When he had got over his first feeling of distress, Dick was touched by the whimsical delicacy, so like herself, of Evelyn's idea. He scoffed at the thought that any test was necessary, that he was not sure of himself—what an odd idea that was, by the way, he thought, remembering Mrs. Umney's words, "I wish it had been later, when you were quite sure that there was nobody else," as if love were a deliberate picking and choosing—but he was glad to feel that she was so much finer than himself. By comparison with her he felt gross and materialistic, and he thanked God for leading him to love a woman who would always keep him in sight of higher things.

He kept a diary of those weeks, committing his inmost thoughts to paper for an offering to her. He sent her white flowers every day. "Surely these innocents," he wrote, "cannot be breaking your rule: they are full of only white thoughts of you. A man might put them on a nun's grave."

Evelyn had promised that when she was ready to see him she would write. The first three weeks of November slipped away without any word from her, but Dick, though tenderly impatient, had no misgiving. He quite understood her wish to prolong the test beyond the legal necessity.

Sentimental associations rather than love of luxury led him to sup alone one night at the restaurant where he and Evelyn had first flaunted themselves

for the benefit of Philistinism. In a mood of gay tenderness he took the table consecrated by her, in the now half-empty room. In imagination he was not alone, and it pleased him to have the table set for two. He gravely toasted her across it. They had been to the opera, he pretended, his opera—why not? In the days of their prosperity they would often come here. It was significant of his conception of Evelyn that he never thought of her in narrow circumstances: she must always be surrounded by what was dainty and refined. It might with wholesomeness have been asked of him as of any lover: Is she the woman you would choose to share your shelter under a hedgerow?

Dick was rather vexed that a solitary person sat at the table next to his own; a round-shouldered, rather shabby-looking man with a grey, lined face and thin, reddish hair and beard. Dick was almost sure that he had never seen the man before, and yet his faded-looking, wide-open grey eyes seemed familiar, reminding him somehow of Draycote; it was as if he had seen the same eyes before in a younger, fresher face. The man had nearly finished his meal when Dick came into the restaurant, and he now sat thoughtfully over his coffee and cigarette, with his elbow on the table and his finely-shaped head resting on his very small and delicate hand. Occasionally he looked, not rudely, but with interest, in Dick's direction. The combination of wide-open eyes with a frowning forehead gave him an odd expression of bewildered earnestness, yet he seemed to be observing not with any particular interest but

because he habitually noted and speculated upon whatever came before his eyes.

Dick was relieved when another man, young, dark, and clean-shaved, with nervous movements and an over-driven expression, who had just taken his hat and overcoat from a waiter and was hurrying out of the restaurant, stopped with, "Hullo, Archdale," and came over to the solitary smoker. The name "Archdale" at once gave point to Dick's vague recollection of the man's eyes. There had been an assistant mistress named Archdale at the Draycote High School, a silent girl with the reputation of being "odd." Dick had hardly spoken to her, but he remembered her face perfectly well. He remembered to have heard that Miss Archdale's father wrote novels, and he had seen a book bearing the name "Henry Archdale" in Evelyn's drawing-room. She had spoken of the book as if it impressed her, but he could not remember what she said: he was not a great reader. This, then, must be Henry Archdale the novelist. The distant association of his name with Draycote and Evelyn pleased and interested Dick, and he found himself paying more attention to the conversation between Archdale and the newcomer, whose name it appeared was Biscoe, and who kept starting to go away as if he had to keep an appointment, than he would have thought proper at another time. Archdale was speaking about a man named Palliser, and Biscoe, in spite of his hurry —he was due at a newspaper office, it came out— seemed extraordinarily interested. Indeed, after a minute or two he pulled out his watch, and with

the air of a busy man who finds he can afford a few minutes, hitched himself on the vacant chair with his arm flung over the back. Both men sat sideways to Dick, so that he could hear pretty clearly what passed between them. He wondered who and what Palliser was. When a man is described by two others, obviously intelligent, as the most extraordinary person of his generation, curiosity is pardonable. Apparently Palliser travelled a great deal, but for what purpose was not explained. Not for sport, certainly, because there were allusions to his hatred of bloodshed.

Archdale talked in a slow, quiet, emphatic voice, with frequent hesitation, feeling for the word he wanted. He seemed to be trying to account for some surprising action of Palliser's by expounding his theory of Palliser's character.

"He's the one real Mystic living," he said. "He doesn't find it necessary to condemn the present; he makes it all square. He perceives the subliminal ego of a dynamo, and shakes hands with it; and then he can get it all down on paper, too, without, like Kipling, using technicalities."

They quoted Palliser's sayings and doings eagerly one against the other.

"He's absolutely fearless and unprejudiced," said Archdale, "and consequently it would be next to impossible to predict how he would act in any given situation. However, granting Palliser's mad—which I personally don't admit for an instant—this is about the maddest thing he's ever done in his life."

Biscoe nodded, and for a little while their words

were drowned by the chatter of a party of men and women who were leaving the place. When Archdale's voice was again audible he was apparently speaking about a different subject.

"—a story which profoundly interested me at the time," he said. "Divorce cases are generally records of lust or vanity, but there was something about this which placed it on an altogether different plane. At least, I arrived at that conclusion, though there was very little to be got out of the newspapers because the case was undefended; though, as I supposed, there was no reason why it need have been so. However, the sequel shows that I was right."

Dick felt the blood sting his cheeks, but he kept quiet, and listened now with amused anticipation. Biscoe had risen, and was buttoning up his overcoat: Archdale, shredding spent wax matches with his delicate fingers, continued in a level voice—

"The psychology of the thing fascinated me. Of course I did not get complete pictures of the people —I had heard nothing at all about the woman—but from my daughter's description of the man, or rather the way he impressed her imagination, he did not fit into the story at all. By no means the kind of person one thinks of as co-respondent. She described him as whole-heartedly absorbed in his work; he is a musician, by the way, but not a bit 'artistic' or precocious,—in fact, rather young for his years,—fond of cricket, haughty-tempered and sarcastic, and with a kind of schoolboy contempt for the society of women. However, he ran away with the other man's wife. The husband seems to have been a decent sort

of brute who drank too much whisky—probably out of sheer loneliness. Great gardener; pathetically proud of his greenhouses, and all that. There was a row, and he struck his wife much as an elephant would turn on a mischievous child, I should say. Anyhow," he concluded, as Biscoe turned to move away, "that's the woman Palliser's married."

Dick got up very slowly from his chair and went round to the other table. Archdale, still splitting matches, looked up inquiringly, and Biscoe, unable to wait, glanced back over his shoulder. Dick, very pale and quiet, leaned with his hands on the table.

"You're mistaken," he said bluntly. "My name is Feddon, and I have the honour to be engaged to be married to the lady you were speaking about."

Archdale coloured, though he looked more concerned than embarrassed.

"I'm a clumsy fool," he said, "but what I said was quite true. The lady who was Mrs. Alemere was married to my friend Palliser to-day."

"But—" began Dick hotly.

"Forgive me for not rising," said Archdale, with a glance round at a group of idle waiters, "but need we attract attention? Pray sit down and try to listen to me patiently. I am in the dark as to what it all means, but it seems to be my misfortune to be the breaker of ill news to you—there's no sense in pretending to misunderstand one another, is there?" he asked. It was quite evident that he kept his composure out of pity, and that he wanted to prevent a scene. "There's a very grave misunderstanding somewhere," he continued, "but I'm

quite sure that whatever has happened Palliser does not know that he has injured you or anybody else. It would be impertinence to offer you advice, but I want you to take this from me, that Palliser is simply not capable of anything underhand."

He spoke with such earnest sincerity, laying his hand on Dick's arm, that offence was impossible. "One moment," he begged, as Dick, with dazed eyes, was rising from his chair. "One thing more, even at the risk of hurting you horribly. Don't you see that if there has been treachery—anywhere—it can't be Palliser? If you have been deceived, it follows that Palliser has been deceived too, and lest you should say or do anything hastily—is there any use in making trouble between Palliser and his wife? My name is Archdale—here's my card. If I can do anything——"

Dick shook him off impatiently.

"Oh, forgive me," he said, fumbling at his cigarette case, "but you're talking in nightmares. The thing's a bad joke: you don't know in the least what you are talking about."

He paid his bill mechanically, walked slowly out of the room and stood on the steps. The fresh air and the noise of the street confused him; he seemed to be standing on the bank of a great river.

"The fool is pulling my leg," he muttered, and half turned, with his hand pushing back the swing door, but the memory of Archdale's face, grave and concerned, put the idea of joking out of the question. He descended the steps and walked a little way along Piccadilly, so unsteadily that a policeman stopped

and looked at him over his shoulder. Dick pulled himself up and walked back to the door of the restaurant. A painted woman took his arm: she had eyes like Evelyn. He shook her off with a foul word, and then lifted his hat and abjectly begged her pardon: calling her "dear" in so pitiful a tone that she stared and laughed. He heard nothing but laughter now, and that seemed to brace him up and clear his thoughts. He called a hansom and told the man to drive to Sidney Gardens. He had no notion what he intended to do, only he must see Evelyn.

The servant stared at his inquiry for Mrs. Alemere, muttered something, and took him up to the drawing-room and lit the gas. Everything looked so much as usual that he felt reassured: the whole thing must be some cruel practical joke. Even his photograph was in its usual place on the little table beside the sofa. But on the sofa itself were three cardboard boxes, unopened, containing the flowers he had sent during the last three days. Every glass and vase in the room was filled with white flowers: the sooty, unwarmed air was aromatic with the faint odour of chrysanthemums. He was standing before the cold hearth when Mrs. Kemp came into the room. At the sight of his face she began to whimper.

"It's a shame, Mr. Feddon," she said, coming up to him with a fawning gesture. He checked her sternly. "Where is Mrs. Alemere?" he asked. "As sure as I stand here, Mr. Feddon, I don't know," she said. "She went away three weeks ago. I had to unpack the flowers; it seemed so cruel to waste them. She would not let me tell you that she was receiving

another gentleman. If you ask me, you are well rid of her."

All at once Dick thought of the poisonous power of this woman. Archdale's words, "Is there any use in making trouble between Palliser and his wife?" came into his mind. He laughed, saying—

"I don't know what on earth you are talking about. I have come for some music which I left here —here it is." He picked up the sheets from the piano and rolled them together. "When does Mrs. Palliser," he emphasised the name, "come back?"

Mrs. Kemp looked puzzled and crestfallen.

"She is not coming back," she said, "she is going abroad. She said she would write and tell me where her things were to be sent. As soon as I get her address I will let you know."

"I shall hear from her, no doubt," said Dick composedly, as he bade her good-night.

As he walked steadily along the pavement with the roll of music under his arm, the feeling uppermost in his mind was wonder that Evelyn could have left his photograph for Mrs. Kemp to pack up with her other things.

CHAPTER XII

THE spectacle of a young man who has just received a crushing blow to his pride and affection is not a pretty one. Sickness is always disgusting, and, on the whole, it is more profitable to reserve one's observation for convalescence, to take note of how and what the patient emerges. During certain weeks, quite inestimable by himself in point of time, Dick Feddon went through the evolution of man over again in his own person. Reptilian, swinish, tigerish, apish moods, all the veils which man has sloughed off in his upward aspiration towards the angels, each possessed him in turn. He did not get drunk, or commit any other bestiality, but all his nature went into the foul melting-pot of evil passions, to be remade over again with something added and something left out. He did his work, so far as he remembered, and it was through one of his own pupils, on a Saturday afternoon after the Christmas holidays, that his eyes were opened to the change in himself.

He pulled her up in the middle of her heartless hammering at the *Serenade* of Chaminade.

"Let me see, Miss Lyle," he said, sitting beside her; "what's all this about?"

She, a fluffy-haired girl with a small waist, melting

eyes and a short, pale, soft mouth, coloured, giggled, and turned back to the title-page.

"Yes, I know all about that," he said, "but what are you doing it for?"

He understood her to say, with blushes and fluttering eyelids, that she wanted to learn some nice pieces.

"Poor little fool," he said.

"Oh, Mr. Feddon!" she murmured, looking up at him shyly.

"Sorry, Miss Lyle," he said. "Would you mind telling me what you do in the daytime?"

She admitted that, for the present, she was in the drapery.

"Comfortable?" he asked.

"Oh yes, Mr. Feddon," she said. Her colour went patchy, she looked down at her pretty hands folded in her lap, and her breast heaved up with a long, sighing breath.

"Well, what a confounded brute I am to take your money for making you dissatisfied with the drapery," he said. "Is there—pardon me again—a young man, and does he pay for the lessons?"

She nodded, and, as he did not speak, pulled out her pocket-handkerchief.

"You mustn't," said she, and with half-closed eyes swayed over, leaning her shoulder against his.

A few weeks ago he would have preached at her, but now he laughed derisively.

"Good Lord!" he said to himself, but aloud; "Poor things, they can't help it." Then she called him a beast, and began to cry in earnest. He sat

smiling at her until she had put away her handkerchief, when he said—

"Will you tell me the young man's name and where he lives, and will you take him a note from me?"

"You're going to give me away," she muttered sullenly.

"I'll let you see what I write."

She presently consented. His name, it appeared, was Herbert Cheeseman. Dick went to his writing-table and first made out a cheque for the amount of her fee for last term. "That's for a wedding present," he said. Then he wrote to Mr. Cheeseman—

"DEAR SIR,—I do not think it is any use Miss Lyle continuing to take lessons from me. She can teach me more than I can teach her. Yours faithfully, RICHARD FEDDON."

"Oh, Mr. Feddon," she said, with a side-glance at him, and a dimple showing in her cheek, "what lies."

"My dear girl," he said gravely, "it is the sober truth."

He led her to the door and down the dingy garden, and opened the iron gate for her.

"Good-bye," he said, holding out his hand. "I hope you will soon get married."

He stopped a 'bus for her. From the top she looked back and saw him still standing at the gate. He waved his hand to her and she timidly responded. The whole episode agreed with her notions, derived from Ladies' Journals, of a romantic experience.

"Poor fellow," she sighed; it was terrible that her fatal gift of beauty should work such havoc. Her little brain was busy with a scheme for impressing Herbert Cheeseman without arousing his jealousy too far. Perhaps he would hasten the wedding: anyhow it was a good thing to remind him of possible competitors. She would not, she decided, mention the cheque. By and by she began to feel uneasy. Mr. Feddon had behaved as she had read of people behaving before suicide. Perhaps she ought to go back and tell him not to take it too hard; that there were plenty of other girls—though that, she knew, would be useless. She had half a mind to confide in the 'bus conductor or a policeman. The man coming for her fare decided her. "Put me down at Brecknock Road," she said. She scurried back, on the wrong side of the road, as fast as her tight corsets would allow her, slackening her pace when she came within a hundred yards of the row of yellow houses where Mr. Feddon lived. She half expected to see a crowd in the dingy garden. But when she looked across, there was Mr. Feddon with a screwdriver taking down his brass plate from the railings.

That same evening, Dick began his orchestral suite *The Man in Armour*. He began it as a joke, writing down the chords with chuckles. It all seemed so diabolically easy that it could not be good. He made of it a stock-pot into which he flung his new-found cynicism, his intolerable heartache—which, he found, were not incompatible. Little Miss Lyle never knew how she was immortalised.

Persons who swear by literal descriptions in music may recognise her in that passage for muted strings in the *Scherzo*. Possibly the solemn fatuity of the bassoon arpeggios stands for Herbert Cheeseman. After a week of it the thing became an obsession. He took it to bed with him, and rose eagerly in the morning to scribble at the score. Somehow life seemed to have cleared up; the only things that mattered were leave and means to interpret himself to the world. He seemed suddenly to have been removed to an immense height above himself and the world, from which he surveyed everything with a grin. Nothing had the power to touch or hurt him. The reflection that his mother and Alemere and Umney and Sherring had all "scored," as it were, gave him neither pain nor resentment. Their "I told you so's" affected him as little as the solemn fooleries of Mr. Worldly Wiseman in *Pilgrim's Progress*. They, like himself, were only material.

Perhaps the most astonishing effect of his new grasp of music was the way it flung the big masters into fresh relations. Irrespective of period, some immediately became old-fashioned and meaningless, others aggressively modern, confiding in him a criticism of life which tallied with his own. They spoke to him with nods and winks: it was as if he had stumbled on the key to a cryptogram.

All the time he knew that there was nothing for him between crying and laughing. If he stopped to think about Evelyn he must curse God and die. The lopping off of what had been his chief purpose in life only increased his industry, but he worked

now at exactly what he wanted to do. His aim was narrowed and so made more intense. Since he no longer needed to earn more than a bare livelihood, he would waste no more time over pupils but savagely laid in wait for orchestral engagements, snatched every chance and held on to it. He knew now what the struggle for life meant, though he was fighting not for the means of existence but the means of expression: to get his tub or stump upon which he might climb to shout his message to the world. For in spite of his outward stillness he was as yet in the shouting mood.

Archdale found him white, hot-eyed and hollow-cheeked, with bitter lips, sitting at his writing-table littered with papers. The ash-tray at his elbow was piled with cigarette ends. Archdale had followed his card with the quiet pertinacity of a donkey: Dick could almost see his large thin ears laid back. It was quite evident that he had expected to be denied, but that he would take no denial. As it happened, the man's humorous consciousness that he was taking a liberty which he intended to go through with, rather pleased Dick, though he was determined that Archdale should not compassionate him. Archdale's curiously familiar and faded eyes took him in with no sign of any emotion beyond curiosity. He sat down gingerly, took the cigarette offered him, and stared at his host with the fixed expression of the naturally retiring man determined to do his duty at all costs. His duty, it appeared, was not at all compassion.

"It's on account of Palliser, I've come," he said. "Palliser is my very dear friend."

Dick's chin went out.

"My good sir," he said insolently, "I'm not in the least interested in Palliser. For my part, Palliser is neither here nor there, as the saying is. Who or what Palliser is doesn't matter a two-penny damn. In fact," he concluded, looking at his visitor through his half-lowered, thick white eyelids, "Palliser is no more to me than you are."

Archdale smiled patiently. He sat stooping forward with his hands folded on his knees, an attitude which gave him a curiously old-womanish look.

"Well, I don't know that I would wish you to take it any other way," he said thoughtfully; "and since you save me embarrassment by being rude I may as well tell you that I wasn't considering your feelings at all; and, to give you back your own words, what you think or don't think about Palliser is of no consequence whatever. The man's above you; but there's just this about it. I've got an idea that if you cared to be small enough you could break Palliser up, just as a dirty little scorpion could break you or me up."

"Carefully, my good man," said Dick, with an unpleasant laugh.

"Oh, don't worry me by making any mistakes about me," said Archdale in a tired voice. "If you are going to thrash me I don't very well see how I can prevent you, but I intend to say what I came to say. Whether we like it or not, chance and my gossiping tongue did make me the oracle to you, and we've got to take the consequences. It's my business to see that Palliser shan't suffer."

"There's just one thing I want to know," said

Dick nervously. "Did Palliser send you to explain?"

Archdale laughed a gentle, sad little laugh.

"Oh, pardon me," he said, "but that's too damn funny. Why, Palliser wouldn't explain to God Almighty."

"Well, go on," said Dick.

"It's difficult to know exactly where to begin," said Archdale, smoothing his thin hair forward over his brows with a monkey-like action. "I want to try to make you understand that this marriage was—well, I don't know that I can put it better than in the cant phrase 'made in heaven'—a very long time ago, before either Mrs. Alemere or Palliser knew of your existence. Frankly, you're not in it; but it's quite evident to me that before Palliser married Mrs. Alemere he was under the impression that you had been told of his—earlier claim, shall I call it?"

In spite of his new self-mastery Dick winced, and Archdale saw it. "Oh, I don't mean that," he said, "if that's any comfort to you. I don't know anything about Mrs. Alemere, but I know Palliser. Palliser renders unto Cæsar or, I surmise, it would have been quite easy for him to have whistled Mrs. Alemere to him at any time. What I mean is that this was all foredoomed, and though Fate played you a nasty trick in letting you imagine that you pulled some of the strings, Palliser wasn't in the conspiracy. Whoever failed of their duty is answerable to God and yourself—but it wasn't Palliser. It cost me more shameless questioning than I care to think of to find this out. To speak brutally, the long and short of

it is this: the most clear-sighted man in the world has got himself an illusion, and it rests with you to open his eyes or not just as you please."

"He shall keep his illusion so far as I'm concerned," said Dick carelessly.

"I don't like the way you say it," said Archdale, "but I take your word. If you knew Palliser you would not be in the least surprised at the impertinences I've committed to make sure of this; and I'll go further, and say that if you knew Palliser you would admit that any inconvenience to yourself simply doesn't matter."

"Oh, don't mind me," said Dick bitterly.

"I don't," retorted Archdale. "Frankly, I've reached a time of life when relative values are everything. Of course," he continued, "it goes without saying that I shouldn't talk like this if you were mawkish, unmanly, aimless, helpless, hopeless. No, you won't drivel. Just to remind you that you've given your word and that I've taken it, I'm going to tell you where they are." He gave Dick Palliser's address in Paris, adding, "I don't know how long they are stopping there. However, I know they are coming back to live in Palliser's flat in Great Marylebone Street, and you're bound to run up against them some time or other—particularly if you come to my house, as I hope you will." He waited for a moment or two to give Dick an opportunity to accept his general invitation, and, as if recognising that he was not yet ready for that, went on—

"You see what an awful weapon you would have

ready to your hand if you were little or revengeful, and wanted to punish Mrs. Palliser. You must remember that I've only seen her for about half an hour at the Registrar's when I witnessed her marriage, but it's quite evident to me that she's found salvation in Palliser. That makes it rather heart-breaking, you know. When a woman is grateful for a man's love there are always possibilities of tragedy."

"Mrs. Palliser is nothing to me," said Dick with a set face.

"That's not true," said Archdale, eyeing him anxiously, "and your task is tougher than that, anyhow. It is comparatively easy to ignore the person that has injured one, but it needs a man to meet him or her on casual terms as if nothing had happened. That's what you've got to do. As I said, you are certain to meet the Pallisers, and you'll probably at the same time meet people who know the outside facts of Mrs. Palliser's history and your temporary association with her. Some of them will believe one thing, some another; what they believe doesn't matter a hang to anybody,—so far as I'm aware I'm the only person that knows that Mrs. Palliser's marriage was a shock and surprise to you, —but unless you mean to give Mrs. Palliser away to her husband you'll have to behave as if your eyes were open all along and you were not taken advantage of in any way. If you avoid them, Palliser will want to know the reason why. Well," he said, rising, "that's what I came to say. I hope you'll come to see me occasionally. I've set up housekeeping this year with my daughter Rose. She was a

colleague of yours, by the way, at the Draycote High School, but I don't suppose you remember her very well."

Dick murmured something polite and evasive, and Archdale turned away with a sigh. At the door the little faded man hesitated and spoke with a sort of wistful timidity—

"I suppose it's no use offering advice," he said, "or I might ask you not to take things too—viciously. I'm a lot older than you are, you know, and I've seen things happen; and I've come to learn that people—particularly women—have to act more or less in tune with their temperaments. I've learned this too of women, that the best of them in love has no conscience for anybody else."

CHAPTER XIII

THE habit of patiently observing and describing life had gained for Henry Archdale the reputation of a cynical writer. Almost at the beginning of his career he had taken for his motto that saying of Montaigne, "I teach nothing: I relate," and the effort of trying to live up to it had made him old and grey and timorous. Nothing dazes like life, and Archdale showed his perennial wonder so little that when persons who had read his books were introduced to him his mild appearance and hesitating manner led them to suppose that, since nobody is born tolerant, Archdale must have spent most of his life in his study. A suspicion of impropriety in his writings, due to his childlike enthusiasm for exact shades, made him to a certain extent a popular author, and he had always been in fairly easy circumstances. He married young and happily, but before he had nearly exhausted his almost frightened admiration for, and his curiosity in, the warm-hearted, high-spirited girl who had joined her life to his in defiance of her parents' wishes, she died, characteristically enough, in saving a child from drowning. The Archdales were spending a holiday at Brighton, and he had stayed in after lunch to chuckle over a newly published book of parodies. He went out with his

pipe in his mouth, still chuckling, and blinking in the blazing sunlight, and strolled idly down to a little crowd in the shadow of the pier. Those who held her arms had just given over and knelt, one on either side, looking up at the doctor who was putting on his coat. An hysterical, overdressed woman was still scolding a bullet-headed little boy in a wet velvet suit. His hat, it appeared, had not been recovered. A bootless, dripping man leaned over a boat, his handsome face awful in its bitter contempt for the people who pressed round him. A man in a yachting cap offered him a whisky flask; he thrust it away with "God blind you!" and burst into tears. He could have saved her if one of the crowd had kept his head; had flung him a few yards of rope. There she lay, her dead face smiling triumphantly up at the sky, so that Archdale could fancy her saying, "I got the little beggar out, Harry." Archdale did not speak; he removed his pipe from his mouth, and looked wonderingly from face to face of the crowd; from his dead wife to the little boy, and back again. In the distance a nursemaid was hurrying over the beach, dragging a little girl by the hand. Archdale went to meet them and gave the maid money, saying, "Take her right away and don't come home to tea." It was some little time before the people understood that Archdale was the husband of the beautiful girl who lay dead in their midst.

The grotesque cruelty of the thing turned him old in an hour. The book he had been reading, the brilliant sky, the lost hat, the absurd unimportance of the object, all seemed like parts of some ghastly

practical joke. Until then he had been rather bookish, but always afterwards, as if from the sense that if he had been on the spot it would not have happened, he was persistently everywhere. He seemed pathetically determined to prevent a recurrence of what could never happen again. Wonder was the feeling uppermost in his memories of that afternoon, and in a world where such a wonderful thing could happen he could never be surprised any more.

Rose was five years old when her mother died. She went to live with her father's widowed sister, afterwards to a boarding-school, and finally to the Draycote High School where she remained as assistant mistress. She spent her holidays at her aunt's house in Somersetshire, where her father occasionally came as a visitor. Their intercourse was consequently casual rather than a matter of course. When Rose was twenty-one the demolition of the building where Archdale had rooms made it necessary for him to look out for new quarters. To a man of his habits the change was full of terrors, and a whimsical impulse led him to confide in his daughter. He was too shy to ask, though he half hoped for her proposal that they should set up housekeeping together. He wished Rose to choose and make her own life, and in his view of things it was selfish to tie her down to a domesticity she was perhaps not suited for. She assured him that she was tired of teaching, and that she did not feel any strong desire to play or paint or write, but thought she could get a great deal of fun out of managing a house. Her aunt's intention of marrying again during the summer made this a good

opportunity to leave her guardianship without hurting her feelings. So Archdale took a small old house in West Kensington and fetched his daughter from Draycote.

Father and daughter had lived apart for so long that they had none of the ordinary relations. During the first few weeks they studied each other with shy amusement, and finally decided to be chums. Aided by her serene common-sense, and with one servant, Rose blundered into efficient housekeeping. Her aunt was well off, and her stay in her home had always been a real holiday, so that she had no traditions to go upon. Consequently she started on a simpler basis than most, and her ignorance of customs distinctly conduced to her father's comfort. By the time Archdale paid his visit to Dick Feddon, Rose had already begun to entertain. It was a joke amongst their friends to drop in and see how the Archdales were getting on. Meal-times were generally passed in discussing the price of things and ways of cooking: the servant was called into the room and shared the council; the guests invaded the kitchen and gave more or less valuable advice.

When Archdale told Rose of his visit and general invitation to Feddon she asserted that he would never come. "He'll be too proud," she said, though, curiously, it was exactly Feddon's pride that Archdale expected would bring him to his house. With his own ideas about modesty, a surer, though intuitive, knowledge than the high-school Principal's of girls in council, and a right estimate of Rose's intelligence, Archdale had discussed Feddon's history with more

freedom than her age might have suggested. Rose expressed no opinion about Feddon beyond the unengaging description her father had quoted to Biscoe, candidly admitted her cordial dislike for Mrs. Palliser, and stated her belief that she had all along meant to leave Feddon in the lurch. Archdale, with an acute perception of sexual prejudices, and fearful lest Rose should come upon facts he suspected but wished not to believe, did not argue, but made her promise that if at any time Palliser brought his wife to their house she would be reasonably civil.

"Oh, well," said Rose, "for the matter of that I probably like her as well as I like him."

Rose's instinctive dislike to her father's old friend, and her entire inability to understand either him or his books, was a disappointment to Archdale, though he persuaded himself that it was only natural at her age.

"There's something inhuman and mechanical about him," she had said after Palliser had paid them his first visit since his unexpected coming to life. "There's a numbed spot in his heart or brain, somewhere, though I can't say where. I think he could be very cruel on principle."

In spite of Archdale's shrewd perception of Dick Feddon's present mood, he was a little surprised when, about six weeks after his visit, Dick called at West Kensington on a Sunday afternoon. Dick's entrance into the dark low-ceiled room, which Rose never would have a drawing-room, was as defiantly easy as possible. He was determined not to wear his heart on his sleeve and, as Archdale had antici-

pated, it was pride which finally drove him to pay the visit. For all that he was horribly nervous, and if he had been able to come down to it he would have found that he was afraid of meeting Rose Archdale. He was only conscious of fear, however, as a sort of hostility. His two visits a week for three years to the High School had only advanced him to a bowing acquaintance with her, and he had seen her in church, where she had rather irritated him by the level carriage of her head and the serene watchfulness of her wide, grey eyes. Hitherto, if he had thought of her at all, it was not so much as an individual as a specimen of that coldly self-possessed type of young woman people insist on calling "Madonna-like." Anyhow, as he now felt more strongly than ever, her appearance implied a superiority to all those moods and evasions and subtleties so dearly feminine, that were summed up for him in Evelyn Palliser. He admitted that Rose had a fine head, too fine for a woman, and he rather liked the way her brown hair with glints of gold in it left her full temples exposed. Her slightly bored mouth, and the fulness under her chin, gave her a look of maturity beyond her years, though youth was evident in her springy footstep and the fine balance and poise of her body. Inclined to judge her ungenerously, Dick thought that the room, which reminded him of a painting he had seen of a Flemish interior, was arranged deliberately to back her up. He received a general impression of dark oak furniture, copper, blue china, painted unpatterned walls, curtains and cushions of pure blue, a wood fire on a broad

hearth, Dutch tiles, and hyacinths in pots. Rose's straight up and down sad green dress, yoked on the breast, looked as if she had evolved it for convenience rather than because it appealed to her as becoming. All these details Dick took in between the door and the middle of the stained floor, and he was thinking that Rose ought to have worn her hair in two thick ropes down her back when she gave him her cool hand.

Rose made no difficulty of their previous acquaintance, "Though," as she said, "I suppose you hardly remember me, as I was not one of your pupils."

Her tone as she looked at him with serene eyes that were nearly on a level with his own was a little brusque. She had not quite her father's sympathetic appreciation of self-protective poses, and Dick's coolness struck her as rather unnatural under the circumstances. She felt, however inaccurately, that she understood exactly the arts by which Evelyn Palliser had bent him to her will, and he started in her estimation as one who had yet to prove himself a man. Feddon's manner was not conciliatory, and for some time Rose gave him as little of her attention as civility required. Archdale was anxiously watching the pair. He was unspeakably sorry for Feddon, and he had hoped that Rose would admit him to comradeship. Judging by Rose's effect upon himself during the short time they had lived together, he had great ideas of her humanising influence. He expected Feddon to hold off for a bit, because he believed him to be in that second stage of the young man's philosophy of women which follows a disillusion. So far Rose's attitude seemed to be that

of hostile curiosity: she was interested but on her guard. Feddon was at least not bored, but his aggressive cynicism, amusing enough to Archdale himself, made her combative.

There were three other people in the room when Dick arrived; a little dark woman with a foreign accent who seemed to be a professional singer, Biscoe, and a very young man named Paget. Dick was not slow to see that Paget, who was slim and fresh coloured, with his curly hair a trifle arranged, admired Rose exceedingly, and that he was young enough to hope to impress her by talking a great deal about his intentions in poetry. He seemed to be a new acquaintance of the Archdales, but already very much at home in their house. Apparently at Paget's own request Archdale and Biscoe called him Arthur. Most of the time he sat on the hearthrug, insisting rather loudly upon his unconventional habits. When Rose said that she trusted he would show the same evidence of genius in his poetry that he did in his life, he looked seriously hurt, and sulked for quite a long time.

Three or four people came in about tea-time, and Dick concluded that Sunday was Rose's day for receiving her friends. He supposed that at least some of them knew a little about himself, though he did not feel embarrassed even when once or twice the Pallisers were mentioned. One woman with white hair and the cheeks of a girl, who, he afterwards learned, was a doctor of medicine, asked him if he did not think Mrs. Palliser extremely beautiful: it was obvious that if she knew of his association

with Evelyn she regarded it without prejudice as a natural piece of Quixotry. It struck him that the Archdales' visitors were all people selected by some rather high standard neither social nor exclusively intellectual. The requirement seemed to be sincerity and a serious interest in at least some one thing, not necessarily artistic or literary. In this house he would be safe from gossip.

Archdale, in strong contrast to his manner when he called upon Dick, was now very shy and nervous. He got Biscoe into conversation with Dick and left them together. Biscoe was editing a new weekly—from general remarks it appeared that Biscoe was always editing new weeklies. This was to be called *The Wooden Horse*. Biscoe talked of his difficulties in getting the men and the stuff he wanted. He stood in a corner and harangued Dick, swallowing his tea in absent-minded gulps, taking piece after piece of cake with no thought for his digestion. Every now and again he stopped to wipe the tea from his waistcoat; the place where he stood was surrounded with a little circle of crumbs.

"Got any theories about music you want to spread?" he asked. "Personally I don't know Wagner from Sullivan, but I understand there's been a great change in things. I'm collecting cranks. If you'd care to have a shot, go round to the Queen's Hall on Wednesday—I'll send you a ticket—and do a thousand words or so. If it won't do I shall tell you so, but it's just worth trying. As a rule, you know, people who do things can't write about 'em. Can't offer you more than two guineas."

The suspicion that he was being helped would have put Dick off but for Biscoe's hint that he was probably not competent to do the work. He promised to try his hand at an article.

The singing woman, whose name was Camporeale, looked doubtful when Dick was asked to accompany her in a song by some new Italian composer. Afterwards she delightedly screamed things at him about his playing, and implored him to come and see her.

It was just then that Rose Archdale, as if she relented of her inhospitality, came over and encouraged Dick to talk about himself. He, touchily imagining an effort, overdid his description of his vagabondage and the character of his associates.

"Perhaps the next dance you go to you'll see me drinking sherry behind a screen," he said. He was piqued because she neither exclaimed nor laughed, but merely said that she was not likely to go to any dances, but if she did she trusted that she would not be so bored by her partners that she would have to look behind screens for amusement.

"I don't like looking behind screens," she said pointedly, "they generally hide something foolish or unpleasant," and then flushed up to her forehead, afraid that she had really hurt him. Dick laughed but coloured, and did not try further to impress her. He was a little flattered that she should think it worth while to take him down, but he did not understand that she was offering to accept him unexplained as worthy of her friendship. He could not get rid of the idea that to a young girl with probably conventional views of marriage his recent history

needed explaining. That Rose refused to accept him as a hero or a martyr was quite obvious, and after a while he had the humiliating consciousness that he had been showing off to no purpose. She was quite impervious to fireworks, but not, as he could see, from dulness. Her cool, slow voice, with its peculiar, almost vicious, emphasis on certain words, the serene gravity of her expression, and her patient examination of his lightest remark made it difficult to tell whether she was laughing at him or not.

Paget, who lived in Hampstead, came away with Dick. They went by Tube as far as Gower Street, and Dick was not surprised at the eulogy of Rose Archdale which poured from Paget's lips. At his own immense height above passion it was amusing and instructive to watch the absurdity of its effect upon another person. He gave to Paget's enthusiasm a smiling attention which that young man, had he been a little less infatuated, would have found intolerably insulting. Paget, it appeared, identified her with Wordsworth's lady, "A creature not too bright and good," etc. One touch of obvious intellectuality, he asserted, would have spoiled her exquisite balance of body and mind. "Equipoised on splendid levels," he quoted, as an apt description of her. Had Feddon noticed the maddening curve of her throat and chin, the infinitesimal droop of her underlip, showing the teeth, and hinting a sob over all the mysterious trouble of the world? And then her deep inscrutable eyes. But for her youth and history one would have guessed at tragedy. Her voice was as if deeper for

dead hopes, as the voice of the sea is graver for her drowned. That might, did not Feddon think, be expressed in a sonnet? By the way, did musicians find the same relief for their emotions in their art as did poets? How he wished he were a musician as well as a poet: words were all too violent for some of the sanctities of life. It was presumption on his part, of course, but supposing he brought words would Feddon wing them? Feddon would be glad to hear that Rose Archdale had spoken of his genius with respect. Paget went over Rose Archdale's body with the daring of the clean-minded man. Her shoulders, round and firm; her breast, a haven for little children; her arms, made to go round someone. To such a woman tired men would bring their troubles; she had the healing hand, the benedictory brow. All this, it came out, Paget had learned in a fortnight, the limit of his blessedness. She was, he feared, not for any one man. Creation groaning for such a goddess could not waste her on the individual —by the way, did Feddon read Palliser? Paget had never met Palliser: as yet the only difference between Rose Archdale and himself had been Palliser's books. Palliser placed women with the forces of nature: Rose objected to being placed with the forces of nature; she was merely, but emphatically, Rose Archdale, she said. But that, of course, was her sublime unconsciousness. Oh, Feddon ought to read Palliser.

All this to the click and clash of the grilles, the chromatic whoop of the lifts, the jolting of the 'bus to the bottom of Camden Road where their ways parted.

CHAPTER XIV

A SHREWD person might have read between the lines of Rose Archdale's letters to Bertha Chaldecote a deliberate naïveté prompted by who knows what crooked impulse in feminine nature to transmit information not asked for; might have read, for example, the defiant statement to Draycote in general, and Mrs. Feddon in particular, "You were wrong, you see, and he can get on very well without you." Mrs. Feddon, indeed, more perceptive than most, fell to thinking, and improved a neglected acquaintance with Mrs. Umney, who had hitherto always been made to feel that she was Mrs. Feddon's lawyer's wife. Now Mrs. Feddon flattered her with informal calls, talked babies and Bertha by the hour, and carried away scraps of more or less accurate information about the Archdales and their circle. Mrs. Umney, who had borne her social neglect with equanimity, did a little resent Mrs. Feddon's underrating her intelligence, and consequently she could not resist qualifying her motherly hope that something might be done through her niece's correspondence towards bringing Mrs. Feddon and her son together, by indulging her gift of humour. How neatly she played Mrs. Feddon, and with what bait could have been told by Mr. Snell, the Weirminster

photographer, from whom Mrs. Feddon bought a photograph of high-school girls in a pastoral play, with Rose Archdale, frank-browed, hand on hip, in tunic and hose with a hunting-horn slung at her side. From her long study of the young Diana's face, which seemed to look out critically on her own, Mrs. Feddon derived a baffling sense of lost opportunities, and a recognition of some of the disadvantages of social and intellectual exclusiveness. She ought, she admitted, to have known Rose Archdale. Mrs. Umney's carefully edited quotations from Rose Archdale's letters to her niece, to the point that Dick was becoming rather more than a casual acquaintance of the Archdales, aroused, as it was intended they should, a vague feeling of grievance, which, considering that she had done with her son for good and all, was altogether unreasonable. "He's been quick in finding his friends," she thought bitterly. What she could learn of Henry Archdale was not encouraging; indeed, she could only look upon Dick's friendship with him as another proof of a subtly poisoned nature. Archdale's books she knew only by the Dean's condemnation, and, with a sincere purpose of studying Dick in his new environment by reflected light, for the first time in her life she did something not open to the world. She ordered the novels, not through the local bookseller, of whom she was the mainstay, but directly from London. They were hidden away, slipped under sofa cushions, and read only when interruption was not likely. The result was that she passed beyond her original intention, and became interested first in the books and then in the point of

view of the writer. She had heard Archdale's work spoken of as irreligious and immoral; she found in it no sneers at orthodoxy or convention, but implied evidence that the writer regarded them as the attempts of perplexed human beings to solve the riddle of their relation to the universe. The recognition that there was another, and, if anything, a sterner sense of duty and obligation than that contained in her ethical tradition was something of a surprise to her. She had the irritating sense that Dick was being justified.

On top of this, and again confusing her ideas, came the news that the man Palliser whom Evelyn Alemere had married was and would remain a friend of the Archdales. Her imagination pictured a vicious, happy family, with Archdale, a satyr-like figure, grinning over the unnameable crowd. On the whole, it is not certain that she would not have preferred Dick to go vulgarly to the devil in the old way.

To Draycote in general, Mrs. Alemere's marriage to Palliser was only the prelude to a reconciliation between Mrs. Feddon and her son. Since the average person acts upon impulses modified by circumstances, the average person could not understand Mrs. Feddon's firm stand by intentions.

Umney, for example, was quite sure that now Dick was presumably in need of consolation Mrs. Feddon would at least reconsider her will.

"She's a woman of her word," he said to his wife, pulling at his heavy moustache with a great air of unbending. "She made her displeasure conditional

upon his marriage with Mrs. Alemere. He hasn't married her—it's true he would have if he could—but he hasn't. She really ought to keep her word."

"How clever and logical you are, Charles," said Mrs. Umney, counting stitches, with her purring smile. "Why don't you speak to Mrs. Feddon?"

He did.

"My dear Mr. Umney," she said, "Dick has behaved very badly, but I have some respect for his intelligence and his sense of fair play. He was offered his choice, and I know him quite well enough to feel sure that he will prefer to abide by it—even though he has been prevented from carrying out his intentions. Mere humanity makes me glad that he has escaped the worst—that he hasn't permanently linked his name with this woman's. Dick won't go to the devil, Mr. Umney."

She said the last sentence a little spitefully, because Umney's dismal forebodings were evident in his preamble.

Draycote set her down as hard and unforgiving. Her quoted expression of relief that Dick had been robbed of his bride was condemned as cynical. Her new sociability—for she was now to be met at tea-tables like any ordinary woman—though appreciated as bringing her within better range of criticism, was taken for another sign of her unfeeling nature. A woman turned forty, and emphatically not idle, does not change her social habits all at once without a reason, and the only reason Draycote saw was Mrs. Feddon's wish to prove that she had done rightly by her son, and that she was comfortable in her mind.

Worst of all was her unnatural friendship with Alemere.

It was Mrs. Feddon's frequent habit on fine evenings to put on the mushroom hat with broad strings that so became her, walk across the common and down the chestnut avenue to Alemere's house, where she would spend an hour or so in the garden. She had to pass the High School, and almost every house of importance in Draycote, including Sherring's, from whose hospitably opened, tall iron gates she seemed deliberately to turn away to enter Alemere's. Popular imagination hinted a diabolical conspiracy. Alemere was obviously better-off without his wife; he drank less and was better tempered: therefore he had plotted to get rid of her. Mrs. Feddon would make no advances to her son: therefore she had lent him to Alemere's detestable scheme.

In the pleasant intimacy that was growing up between them, Alemere saw most of the things that his neighbours missed. He saw that Mrs. Feddon was driven into other people's houses by sheer loneliness, that she had lost her serenity and was ageing fast, and that she lent a grateful ear to any praises of her son. One evening in late May, as they leaned on the iron railing under the budding elms, watching his Norfolk polled cattle against a green and apricot sky, he tried what a less simple man would not have dared.

"Have you written to Dick lately, ma'am?" he asked bluntly.

The obvious naturalness of his question made her feel for the moment ashamed.

"There would be nothing to write about, you see, Mr. Alemere," she said, after a little hesitation. "Mere information about my health, mere news, he can get from—other sources."

The bitterness in the concluding words was not lost upon him. "But you are lonely," he said, "and I don't like to feel that I owe this pleasure to your loneliness."

She hastened to assure him that such was not the case. His initiation into the secrets of plant life had opened out a new world to her. "I come to make up for lost time," she said brightly. "I have a passion for knowledge, and you are teaching me such a great deal."

He shook his head slowly, crumbling a leaf of scented verbena between his big finger and thumb.

"A childless man knows what you have cut out of your life," he said gravely. "No doubt you thought you were right at the time, and acted from a high principle, but since things have fallen out as they have——"

"Well," she said stubbornly, cutting him short. "As the circumstances are Dick is much better off where he is. He won't have the humiliation of meeting old acquaintances. He could have had no prospects in Draycote, but whatever has happened can't affect him in London. He had to begin over again and he has done so—from all I hear with a good deal of success."

The big man looked down at her with a whimsical smile at the feminine littleness which persisted through her sorrow. Dick's prosperity, as he saw,

was a very sore subject with her. He flung away the leaf and snapped his fingers.

"That's not the point," he said, "and you know it. Dick is too good a sort to go under; there was never any danger of that. But your holding off makes all the difference to him between just getting along and real happiness. Write to him; go to see him—anything to let him know that your anger is dead."

"Oh, but you don't think it was anger, do you?" she said, turning her eyes full upon him, as if the idea were new to her, and made her reflect.

"Very well, ma'am," he said impatiently, "we need not quarrel about words. Call it, if you like, a matter of principle. Principles are all very well, just as theories in gardening are all very well, but there are times when you have to let them go by the board and trust to instinct. I feel it is impertinent of me to speak to you like this, and you must forgive me. You see, I can't forget that I am in a manner responsible for the whole trouble."

"If he were ill or in want I should go to see him as a matter of duty," she said thoughtfully, as if she were working it out for herself, "but while he is well and prospering there is no need. It is wiser to accept the fact that we have agreed to differ. I can honestly say that I have forgiven him for any personal sorrow that he has caused me."

"Then tell him so."

"To have it flung back at me, to be further humiliated?" she asked energetically. "No, Mr. Alemere, I know exactly in what way Dick is proud."

Alemere, not very clever, was acute enough to catch the note of grievance. It was not "I will not forgive," but "He will never believe that I have forgiven."

"Don't you see," she continued, as they turned and paced up the drive together, "supposing I agreed to pocket my principles and to act as a mere mother, what would have been possible if Dick had had his own way is now out of the question. He would mistake it for pity, and he would not stand that even from me. It would only deepen the quarrel. Dick is always ready to share his happiness, contentment softens him, but he never would admit even me to his sorrows. And do you know," she said, raising her head with a smile, "I'm glad of it."

"Well, it's a sad pity," said Alemere with a sigh. She looked at him furtively. She read him very well. He was so devoutly thankful for his year's peace and comfort that he wanted all the world to be comfortable. Not a very high attitude, but perhaps the best he was capable of, and at least the beginning of charity. But when, timidly and confusedly, he went on to offer himself as an ambassador to her son, her sense of humour was awakened and she saw the miserably farcical nature of the situation.

"Come, come, Mr. Alemere," she said, laying her hand on his arm with a sprightliness unusual in her, "we are not in a comic opera."

He was, as she could see, a little hurt, and his speech tailed off into a perplexed mumble. All this

discussion concentrated and made clear the exact point at issue between herself and her son, and she was thankfully able to claim that it was not a personal grievance but an idea she stood out for. It was the idea of marriage that she conceived of as in peril. On every side, so it seemed, whether by the subtle undermining of writers like Archdale, or the crude practicality of men like Alemere, the institution was being attacked, and she felt a morbid exultation in the thought that she sacrificed her son and her dearest affections in its defence. Like most martyrs she wanted to proselytise. She felt it her duty to make Alemere see that so sacred an institution as marriage must not be discussed in terms of common-sense; that it was his duty to feel uncomfortable.

"I quite think that it was better for both of you that you and your wife should live apart," she said, when her reflections found words; "but do you still consider that you did right in divorcing her?"

"It is the law of the land," he said stubbornly.

There he rested as securely as she upon her severe interpretation of canonical law. Just for a moment it flashed into her mind that possibly all of them, even Palliser, rested on principles. A sentence out of one of Archdale's books came to her: "The libertine evades the marriage laws; the idealist breaks his head against them." Well, to be honest, neither Palliser nor her son could be condemned as libertines. What if both of them, like herself, were idealists? She was curious about Palliser; curious

to know of his first association with Alemere's wife. She ventured to ask a question.

"I knew that she had had more than one proposal before she married me," he answered frankly. "I was proud to think it. Why she refused Palliser then, I don't know. I believe, now, that she always cared for him. But her people were strongly against it; he was not well off, and queer in his ways. A Socialist and a wanderer."

The conclusion was disconcerting. Alemere's intemperate habits, his dishonour and her son's disgrace might be considered as fairly direct consequences of a blunder. Might there not be something wrong with an institution which compelled a crime before a blunder could be rectified?

Between Archdale's philosophy and Alemere's simplicity Mrs. Feddon felt that her ideas were being disturbed.

CHAPTER XV

It is not extravagant to say that Sherring desired Mrs. Feddon for her moral distinction — as the Cockney tourist picks out the whitest marble to carve his name upon. For certain natures purity is provocative, like iced water to jaded palates. All desire has in it a touch of hate for the thing desired, and it is the wish to stain that keeps many bachelors in the paths of virtue.

Somewhere between Mrs. Feddon's grievous loneliness and her mental unrest Sherring hoped for his opportunity. Parasites flourish upon the organism already embarrassed, and it throws some light on Sherring's character that in order to gratify his desires he was not above accepting the situation so unflattering to himself. There are two ways to success in this world: one, as Fairclough pointed out to Dick Feddon, is to know what you want yourself; the other, perhaps quicker and more certain if you belong to the tribe of pandars and parasites, is to see clearly what other people want. Mrs. Feddon was perplexed and unhappy: so much the more reason why she should make the most of what consolation life had still to offer her. A less shrewd man than Sherring, Umney for example, with the same end in view, would have laid himself

out to appeal to her womanly tenderness, none the less real for being fastidiously reserved and now baulked of an object by her son's holding off: Sherring took advantage of her spiritual uncertainty. Nothing confirms a person's hold upon any creed like the attempt to convert other people.

Sherring began to create an atmosphere of the strong man wavering in his unbelief. He flattered Umney by talking to him about the Meaning of It All, and confessed that he envied him his certainty of a future state. "Light more Light. Ah yes, Umney, there it is," he said, shaking his head sorrowfully as he poured himself out some whisky. Umney admitted himself secure in his belief, but useless as a spiritual guide. His home life, he hinted with a sigh, denied him that peace of mind necessary for deep thinking. Before his marriage he used to read. But Mr. Lavington, the Vicar of Draycote, was a very good man, he said. Sherring laughed and shrugged, and after a moment Umney laughed too, though he was not quite sure why. He rathered admired Mr. Lavington's habit of quoting Tennyson in his sermons.

"That's just my difficulty, you see," said Sherring earnestly: "the recognised authorities are either out of reach or else abject fools."

Then, lest Umney should think him too easy, he hastened to assure him that he still was, as he always had been, a good Agnostic. But ever since that wretched business of Mrs. Alemere's he had been thinking, and he had come to the conclusion that, whatever the fact implied, the great majority

of persons, particularly women, could not live straight without some authority beyond reason. He used to separate morality from religion, but he was not so sure about that now, and he was forced to recognise the great power of the Church in keeping society together—as a sort of moral policeman, in fact. Well, that power must be derived from something more than mere tradition. And, to be quite frank, recent discoveries in science had seriously shaken the materialistic conception of the universe; and it was significant that some of our foremost men of science were Christians. The revival of occultism, too, showed that there was a craving in human nature for the supernatural. Still, the honest convictions of a lifetime, and, alas, not a short lifetime, were not lightly to be parted with. Meanwhile, would Umney look upon him as one humbly waiting for guidance?

Umney spoke feelingly of the gratification he derived from Sherring's confidence. "Why don't you ask Mrs. Feddon to introduce you to Dean Maidment?" he said.

Sherring was profoundly agitated. "My dear man," he said, "Mrs. Feddon must know my deep respect and admiration for her, and—well, to be quite frank, Umney, she'd doubt my honesty. When a man changes his opinions people always suspect an interested reason."

"Mrs. Feddon wouldn't," said Umney stoutly, "she'd be glad to help you. I know she admires your firmness of character."

But Sherring shook his head, and changed the

conversation with the reckless air of a man condemned to dree out his own weird.

When Umney looked at his watch and rose to go, with a sigh and a remark about the rarity of his intellectual pleasures nowadays, Sherring said—

"You must forget all about what I told you just now, old fellow. I'm not given to talking about my private troubles, and I sincerely hope you won't say a word to Mrs. Feddon. She has sorrows enough of her own."

Umney squeezed his hand, and they parted in a silence too full for words.

"How easy it is to misjudge people," said Umney to his wife an hour later. "I have always looked upon Sherring as a cold, hard man of the world."

"How you startled me, Charles," said she. "I was dreaming about the Walrus and the Carpenter."

It was shortly after this that Mr. Lavington, gabbling weekday Evensong to a congregation of three old women and the district nurse, spied Sherring lurking behind the font. Mr. Lavington popped off his surplice and hurried round to the porch in time to meet Sherring, who behaved as guiltily as if he had been caught robbing the offertory box. He stammered the unlikeliest explanations of his presence, and spoke generously of the beauty of the Liturgy. "Lighten our darkness," he murmured. "No wonder the old and the world-weary come to Evensong."

Mr. Lavington, who was lean and ferret-faced, hoped that Sherring would not notice the tennis shoes and white flannel trousers under his cassock,

as he breathlessly apologised for the shortened form of service.

"I try to do my duty," he said, looking over the low wall to the placid levels of the common where two worn-out horses grazed, and an old road-mender, with wire goggles slipping off his nose, dozed in the sun beside his heap of stones, "but I have many calls upon my time; and perhaps in this age of luxury and hurry and bustle a few minutes' withdrawal from the turmoil of life is the most that can be expected from busy men and women engrossed with the cares of money-getting. Besides, I knew that Mrs. Feddon, who is our only regular attendant, would not be there, because I saw her going to pay a call on Mrs. Umney as I hastened to the summons of the bell."

As they passed out of the lych-gate they met Mrs. Feddon, light-footed and erect, crossing the common. Sherring, stopped in the middle of a sentence, lifted his hat and hurriedly withdrew, leaving Mr. Lavington, blushing for his feet, to catch Mrs. Feddon up.

Mrs. Feddon was Honorary Secretary to the East Window Fund. Sherring gave twenty pounds, signing himself on the subscription list as "Well-wisher." When Dean Maidment came over to unveil the window, he and his wife lunched at the Vicarage and dined with Mrs. Feddon. Sherring was invited to meet them.

Mrs. Feddon blushed a little when she shook hands with him. She was not the first woman to fancy that she liked a man because she disliked his opposite. Sentimentality disgusted her; but she did not

recognise that Sherring was reserved because he was coarse-grained and lacking in imagination. She had a slavish regard for firmness of character, which she was unable to distinguish from obstinacy, and now that Sherring showed signs of grace it was not only an intellectual hobby but a sacred duty to win him over. She a little dreaded the Dean's archness, hoped he would not say anything foolish, and trusted that Sherring would not misunderstand Mrs. Maidment, who carried her head a little on one side, and smiled perpetually.

There was a general atmosphere of knowingness at the dinner-table when the afternoon's function was referred to; but the Dean was very tactful, and carefully avoided seeming cocksure of his prospective convert. Sherring's manner was that of the respectful inquirer. Only once he let fall an unsympathetic remark upon African Missions, just to remind them that he still reserved his opinion, and that he was not there on false pretences. The Dean answered him with manly directness.

"Men like you, Mr. Sherring, are of more value to the Church than any number of thoughtless or indifferent Christians," he said. "You have a definite platform; ours is a Church Militant, and concrete criticism has the best possible effect, bracing, hardening—Kingsley's 'Wild North-easter.'"

Mrs. Feddon saw that the Dean was impressed by Sherring's bluntness, and she humbly and sincerely thanked God that this great opportunity had been allowed her at a time when her own firm hold upon truth was in danger of being loosened. Something

of her gratitude was inevitably reflected upon Sherring; she could not but look upon him as the instrument of Divine Providence.

Left to their wine, the two men talked about the terrible state of society.

"It is authority that is needed," said the Dean. "It is being proved over and over again that individual conscience will not do. The sense of right and wrong—and this is a great concession for me to make, Mr. Sherring—is so much a matter of temperament. There must be a standard from which there is no appeal." He rose, went to the door, and closed it. "Look at poor Dick Feddon," he continued in a lower voice. "No boy could have had a better bringing up, a more admirable mother." He lifted his glass and looked at it as if Mrs. Feddon were there in solution. "What is the history of his fall but the history of rebellion? I gather that for some time his faith, his reverence for the Church, was weakening. The temptation came, and where were his training, his hereditary influences, his affection for his mother? Absolutely powerless."

Sherring, as one privileged by his Agnosticism to examine the natural history of vice, grew confidential on the subject of Dick Feddon. He spoke reluctantly as one who did not wish his opinion to be quoted or even taken as final. He begged to differ from the Dean as to the order of cause and effect in this particular instance. He would prefer —no, that was wrong, he would like to be able to think with the Dean—but the fact was that Dick Feddon had altered his religious convictions to suit

his conduct. He wished to play fast and loose with the Seventh Commandment, and he had therefore invented a moral code which excused his sin. Sherring was no Puritan, but for a long time he had watched Dick's intimacy with Mrs. Alemere with grief and alarm. To put it frankly, running away with her was perhaps the most honourable thing Dick Feddon could do. Of course the Dean had heard that the marriage had not taken place?

"Marriage?" demurred the Dean, pinching his underlip, with a suddenly austere glance, as if to remind Sherring that he must not go too far. Sherring generously allowed him the point.

"I spoke as a worldling," he said. "However, I'm forced to the conclusion that young Dick is more depraved than one would have thought possible at his age. Brought to the scratch, he did not care to saddle himself with a legal tie. Why should he? He has chosen associates with whom the code is easy. Have you read Palliser? Well, briefly, the man advocates promiscuity. Of course he has given this woman the legal protection of his name; she is known as Mrs. Palliser. Obviously Palliser is better able than Dick Feddon to keep her in luxury. I shouldn't be surprised to hear that the whole matter had been comfortably arranged between them, and one can pretty well imagine Master Dick's position in the *ménage*."

The Dean expressed appropriate horror. "A sink of iniquity!" he said in the dropped voice men use when they want to hear more, and glancing at the door. They drew their chairs a little closer together,

while Sherring, by virtue of his scientific habits, quoted cases of moral pathology that had come within his own experience.

"You don't mean to say so!" exclaimed the Dean in conclusion; "though of course these things are only a matter of degree, of ingenuity, I might say, when once the sacramental character of marriage is lost sight of. You think, then, that young Feddon is past redemption?"

Sherring shrugged his shoulders.

"I suppose that, like the Prodigal Son, when he is tired of the husks he'll want to come back. I daresay we shall hear of him being received into the Roman Church. That seems to be the usual end of these young men with unbalanced nervous systems."

Sherring had absolutely no private motive beyond defamation. Even the most independent of us unconsciously assumes at least one human critic of our private actions, and Sherring could not rid his mind of the watching shade of Dick Feddon. In his solemnly tremulous moments of spiritual wrestling with Mrs. Feddon he was irritated by the shadowy ironical grin of her son—"Damn him!" At such times, Sherring's prominent front teeth ached reminiscently. He knew better than to condemn Dick to his mother. Indeed, he often sympathetically threw in a word for him. "Ignorance of the world claims more victims than depravity"; "He is more to be pitied than blamed," and so on.

He and the Dean maintained just that difference

of opinion with regard to the panaceas for social degeneration which keeps men pleasantly impressed by each other. The Dean set great store by the confessional: Sherring spoke feelingly of the Power of Good Women.

The Dean discreetly smiled and suggested that they went upstairs.

The ladies dropped an air of confidences when the men entered the drawing-room. Sherring somewhat pointedly avoided Mrs. Feddon, while the Dean, advancing over the carpet with measured paces, and softly humming, beamed paternally upon her. Between him and his wife was the expression of "Well?" It is astonishing how for quite good people the end justifies the means. Sherring talked to Mrs. Maidment about babies, lamenting his ignorance; the plump little woman's eyes were moist with sympathetic emotion. Presently the Dean led his wife to the piano, and they sang "Graceful Consort" out of the *Creation*, looking into each other's eyes.

When he took leave of Mrs. Feddon the Dean found an opportunity to murmur—

"You have done what none of us could do. No man could have influenced a sceptic so intelligent. It is a great pity that the Church has not some means of officially recognising the noble work done by women." He went over a rosary of names: St. Elizabeth, St. Agnes; delicately flattering her.

Sherring was invited to the Deanery. There were certain books that might interest him. He accepted with becoming hesitation.

"If I may come frankly as one still in darkness?"

"Oh, surely," said the Dean, spreading his hands.

During the drive home Mrs. Maidment hoped it was all for the best. "Oh, I think so," said the Dean sleepily. "What is the term used by the old physicians?—ah, yes, '*corrigens*.' Mrs. Feddon was very young when her husband died, and certain natures tend to develop acidity. I would not have her less fervent for the Faith, but a little human affection is an excellent corrective."

Mrs. Maidment was silent for a little while, and then she said, "That is not quite what I mean. Do you think he will persuade her to marry again?"

"My dear," said the Dean, now wide awake, "surely that is rather premature? I trust you do not regard Mr. Sherring's desire for illumination as prompted by ulterior motives?"

There's a little paper of Intercessions published monthly by a certain Confraternity. It was Mrs. Umney who first noticed in the June number that Grace and Guidance were desired for "one, long an unbeliever, now in spiritual difficulty" in her own parish. The passage was underlined, a note of interrogation added, and the paper passed from hand to hand with nods and whispers. As Evelyn Alemere once observed, "There's a great air of naughty-naughty about some people's religion."

CHAPTER XVI

After Dick Feddon's first adventure in musical criticism he found that there were quite a number of things he wanted to say, and that a column in *The Wooden Horse* was a very convenient place for saying them. Biscoe allowed his signature. Dick used his subject as a trigger to release an explosive philosophy of things in general, though Archdale reminded him that explosion is mainly the liberation of gas, and quoted those wise words "the desire to startle the middle-classes is in itself middle-class." Readers were a little bewildered by Dick's fireworks, and wondered where the music came in; but then it was the function of *The Wooden Horse* to bewilder. "Whom the gods destroy they first make mad" was Biscoe's motto in his dealings with the Philistines, or Trojans, as he preferred to call them. In outward form and general arrangement *The Wooden Horse* was wooden enough to deceive an Academician, but inside was Biscoe's band of young desperadoes. Biscoe, spoken of as the ablest editor in London, never wrote a line himself beyond the Note to his first number. He defended his title with an elaborate theory of the Trojan War. Helen personified the Arts held captive by convention in the strongholds of fat-living and fat-thinking. Ilion was anywhere,

from the Athenæum Club to Burlington House, and the Trojans, of course, were aggravated Philistines; those in authority. It became the joke among cultured persons to identify Hector and Andromache: You-know-who, grey curls and all, as "the enamour'd Phrygian boy" kept the town laughing for a week.

Now Dick began to reap the advantages of his academical training. When irritated contemporaries turned to rend him they found a gravely learned master of his subject. His late experience as a working instrumentalist, too, made him respected by practical musicians. Dick Feddon, with white face and tumbled plume of black hair, plunging into the stalls, eager and irreverent, with a nod for the bassoon and a grin for the kettle-drum, was a picturesque and friendly figure to the mere bandsman. At the Archdales' he met everybody, and amongst them the wife of an American who had views about Sunday concerts, and the money to indulge them. Dick was given a hall and a band to interpret modern Anglo-Saxon composers. Almost at once his peculiar talent as a conductor attracted attention. It was as if he composed on the spot with his band, they said; rehearsal was as unevident as the throes of the creator. One felt that there had been no music there until he came on the scene. His men played as if hypnotised: people said that he did hypnotise them, and there were scientific articles in the ha'penny journals to explain how he did it. On top of this came his *Man in Armour*. The mocking humour of it took London by storm; people praised the *suite* all the more

because they were never quite certain when the composer was laughing at them. Passages of sheer beauty in which their dearest sentimentalities were indulged, were ironically developed, burlesqued, and finally chucked aside in pitiless derision. All this, said the authorities, without any trick-work; no puns or guffaws by means of special instruments. Out of it all emerged the composer's intention, the cool, balanced man of the world, armed at all points, polite and complaisant, but in whose quiet lurked the lightning of satire and repartee. There were the usual silly superlatives—it was *Don Giovanni*, and Berlioz' *Faust* rolled into one, and Dick began to be a personage in a small way. What was known of his previous history gave a piquancy to his present impertinences: he was paragraphed and photographed, and in no little danger of getting spoiled. Fairclough growled, called him Svengali, Paganini Redivivus, and sent him picture postcards of a long-haired gentleman with a 'cello, on his five hundredth appearance in a drama written round a melody derived from Chopin's Eighteenth Nocturne. Archdale saw that the matter was rather more serious than the spoiling of an artist; was, in fact, Dick's alternative to riotous living, a reaction from misery, and he worried a good deal not only on Dick's account, but because he recognised that to the initiated his feverishly high pitch was as significant as if he had gone about moaning his fate. Archdale wondered what would happen when the Pallisers came back to London.

Presently the little cultured crowd whose keenest

pleasure it is to know all about the burnt wings of artists—possibly to console themselves for not being able to fly—began to pry and whisper. *The Man in Armour*, they said, was the most diabolically clever revenge any man had ever taken upon any woman.

Dick was not immediately ashamed of his success: it needed Rose Archdale's congratulations for that. He was getting used to being regarded, particularly by women, as a terribly dangerous person, and half believed that he was, when the girl's clear eyes showed him a person of quite another sort.

"I know I'm talking foolishly," she said, with quiet deliberation, "because what one reads into it isn't a musical question at all. Musically I suppose it's all very clever and deserves what people say about it. But you've struck at all women. It's like the joke about the mother-in-law or the newly married wife or the old maid. I've seen drawings of old maids that were true in every line, but made one cry for shame. If it is possible to be caddish in music you have been caddish."

Dick flushed up, but laughed and said that people must interpret him as they pleased. It was enough for him to try to tell the truth about his experience of life.

"But half the truth is the worst of lies," she said, losing her composure. "The real man in armour doesn't wince or blaspheme. This is like the scribbling on the wall of the whipped boy."

Dick bowed ironically, and asked for some more coffee. Rose felt reproved for bad taste in having spoken, and handed him his cup in silence.

"Well," he said, pointedly moving away as Paget appeared, "I'll leave my reputation between you."

Paget looked inquisitively at Rose's flushed face.

"Why are you and Feddon always quarrelling?" he asked.

"Because he isn't sincere," she snapped at him.

"Oh, come."

"Oh, I don't mean in your sense of the word," she said impatiently. "It's one of the slang terms for being unpleasant just now, isn't it? I don't know which I like least, the sham sentimentalist or the sham cynic."

Paget sighed.

"Alas, poor Feddon," he said. "Alas, poor me."

She laughed, though in the same moment she recognised that it would not have occurred to her to make any comparison between the two men. She knew, angrily, that she had a quite unjustified wish to correct Feddon, but what Paget was or was not did not seem a matter of much consequence, so long as he amused her.

"No, but seriously," said Paget, sitting beside her, "I think you're a little rough on Feddon. When a man's come a cropper over a woman, he's naturally inclined to be vicious."

Rose eyed him coldly.

"Do you think it's quite nice," she said, "to listen to gossip about one's friend's personal affairs?"

Paget shrugged his shoulders.

"It isn't necessary," he retorted, "when you can listen to his compositions."

"I don't see what right you have to suppose that,"

she said with some heat, "and I happen to know that *The Man in Armour* is entirely imaginary."

Paget looked at the end of his cigarette and smiled.

"You seem to be in Feddon's confidence," he said, in a rather aggrieved tone.

"Don't be silly," she said; "tell me what you've been writing."

Paget immediately became unobservant, and therefore did not notice that Rose was distraught and that her attention wandered more often than was complimentary to his affairs to the other side of the room, where Feddon sat talking to her father and Biscoe. She noticed that when he was not speaking, and in spite of his frequent laugh and apparent high spirits, his face looked haggard, and that occasionally he gave an impatient shrug with his shoulders as if to dismiss gloomy reflections. She also observed that her father was studying him with an expression of concern.

She found an opportunity when Feddon was saying good-night to speak to him alone.

"I'm sorry if I was rude," she blurted out girlishly; "I had no business to say what I did about *The Man in Armour*. Please put it down to ignorance."

She was white and breathing quickly, and any man whose imagination was not dominated by another woman would have felt flattered or touched according to his temperament, but Feddon was in a cantankerous mood.

"Please don't worry, Miss Archdale," he said,

looking down at her rather superciliously; "I expect you've been reading the *Lantern*, and it's got into your head."

She took the ill-natured remark with a little twist of her mouth that ought to have made him ashamed, but he only said "Good-night, Miss Archdale," bowing over her hand with exaggerated deference.

Praise or blame made little difference to Dick in his present humour. For some time he had been hard at work upon his *St. Augustine* symphonic poem. The human side of the Confessions appealed to him strongly; he revelled in the opportunity for barbaric colouring, and though he would not have admitted it, he was not least attracted to the subject by the chance it seemed to afford for flouting orthodoxy. His sympathies instinctively went with the Saint's earlier life, and if he had analysed his own mood he would have found it well described in the words, "Nor yet was the wound healed which had been caused by cutting away my former love; only it ceased to burn and throb, and began to fester, and was more dangerous because less painful." It was probably unfortunate that he found such a complete refuge in his work and that his affairs continued to be so prosperous. Material wretchedness is a great help to sanity. The fact that he had been deceived did not lessen his wish to prove that he had been right in his choice. It was the "I told you so's" he still smarted under, and he still set Evelyn on a pedestal above all other women: he blamed her less than circumstances. She was like the splinter of glass, from the goblin

mirror, which stuck in Kay's heart. "It did not hurt him now, but the splinter was still there;" and, as in Andersen's tale, the people said "That boy must certainly have a remarkable head."

He had settled into a manner, especially towards women, of ironical politeness, as if he conceded their power but was himself emancipated. Fastidiousness kept him from vice, but he showed a preference for the society of sinners. He dressed carefully and even a little finely, ate and drank of the best, and though working so hard, allowed himself intervals of idleness when he was to be seen in the company of the gracefully depraved.

Then, one afternoon in September he met Evelyn in Regent Street. She was walking radiantly by the side of her tall husband, dressed with the dainty finish which more than anything seems to express a woman's physical and moral well-being. Palliser, in defiance of all convention, wore a loose grey flannel coat and a soft hat; he walked with his hands behind him, his bearded chin in the air and his great blue eyes fixed so steadfastly on the skyline that passers-by occasionally turned to see what he was looking at. He was so completely lost to his surroundings that Dick might have passed unrecognised but for Evelyn's nervousness. She saw him coming from the distance of a dozen paces or so, and immediately her footsteps shortened and wavered with embarrassment. Dick felt his head swim and he went physically sick and faint. Evelyn stared at him with wide-open eyes, and her lips were set in a smile, almost a grin, of fear. For a moment he thought that she would pass him,

but as they drew together she slackened speed as if against her will, and clutched at her husband's arm.

"Tony," she said, "this is Mr. Feddon."

Palliser came down from the clouds with "Ah," and his eyes, terrible in their innocence, searched Dick's face as they had examined his photograph, with a gravely questioning glance. Evidently the situation for him was not very embarrassing. He was merely face to face with the man who had brought him his wife, and the thought gave an added friendliness to his handclasp.

"I've heard a great deal about you from my wife," he said, holding Dick's hand for a moment longer than was conventional. Evelyn broke in eagerly, congratulating him upon his success and speaking of the Archdales with insistence, as if warning him of the part he was to play. He answered at random; all the while his eyes were drinking in her beauty, more intense, he bitterly agreed, for contentment. He noted the quiet confidence of Palliser, standing by and watching his wife's animated face with an affectionate smile.

"You'll come to see us, won't you?" said Palliser as they parted. Dick murmured something while Evelyn's eyes were fixed imploringly on his face. He understood that she was begging for an opportunity to explain, and his own eyes assured her that no explanation was possible.

He knew now that he loved her as much as ever, and that all along he had been training himself to meet her, to prove to her that he was emancipated. His *Man in Armour* had been written with one

eye upon her; it was the overstatement of hysteria, "the scribbling on the wall of the whipped boy." The moment he met her his armour went to pieces, and it was equally evident that she knew that he still loved her, and that she did not love him at all. No woman who loved a man could fawn upon him so abjectly. She was terribly afraid of what he might do, but her very fear only proved how completely she had given her love to another man. As he walked blindly along the pavement, and the tumult in his mind gradually subsided, he began to recognise that though he loved Evelyn as much as ever it was with a different sort of love. He now had no ideal to keep unsullied: it was the flesh-and-blood woman he so fiercely desired. He would have given his soul to take her in his arms and bruise her lips with brutal kisses even against her will. The memory of her arms and her lips anguished him. At the time when she had been free to his caresses he had thought little of his privilege in his longing for complete union with the pure being he imagined veiled by her beautiful body. Her eyes, her lips, her hair, were but symbols of her exquisite soul. Now that he knew her soul to be base, he still would have sacrificed his honour to possess her body whether she loved or hated him. Worst torture of all was the sense of lost opportunities; the conviction that she not only did not love him, but that she must despise him for his self-restraint during the time when she was under his protection.

CHAPTER XVII

"DEAR DICK," she wrote, "I do not ask you to forgive me; that I suppose is impossible; but I want to tell you that your holding aloof is causing me a great deal of anxiety. I can't believe that you are revengeful, or that you want to cause unhappiness between my husband and myself. He believes that you gave me up: I feel quite sure that you will never tell him the contrary, but your pointed avoidance of us and of the Archdales since our return to London makes him wonder, and when a man wonders about his wife there are always risks of misunderstanding. I ask you for my sake to come and see us as if nothing had happened. He is a good man, Dick, and in abusing his confidence I have done him a greater wrong than I did you. He makes it all the harder for me by liking you, and constantly asking about you. Won't you come on Thursday afternoon? Yours sincerely,

"EVELYN PALLISER."

This was nearly three weeks after their meeting in Regent Street. Dick did not make any mistake about the meaning of her letter. She knew too surely what love was to offer him kindness instead, in the hope of easing her conscience: she wanted to be friends because she was afraid of his enmity. His first impulse was to write contemptuously, telling her that she was safe so far as he was concerned, but

that to expect him to explain away her falseness was asking too much even of him. After a while, however, he began to feel a savage pleasure in the thought that though she had given herself to another man, he was still necessary to her, that if not her happiness at least her peace of mind was still in his hands. He knew that he could not bring himself to hurt her, either by acting or by standing on one side. Her treachery had altered the character of his love, but it had not in the least weakened her strange power over him. She was like a subtle poison in his veins, unable to nourish or inspire his nature, but making it intolerant of every wholesome influence.

So he braced himself and went to Great Marylebone Street. The lofty pile of red, Queen Anne buildings, arranged in flats, hinted at effortless prosperity, and gave him a keen sense of being out of it. Not for years could he have placed Evelyn in such comfortable surroundings. The sober, middle-aged Scotswoman who came down the stone staircase in answer to his ring at the outer door looked like an old family servant. The contrast between her and Mrs. Kemp was significant that Evelyn was done with everything doubtful or disreputable. She had sold him for a mess of pottage. These were his reflections as he followed the servant up the flagged staircase to the third floor.

Evelyn was a marvellous actress. She rustled forward out of her soft, nestlike surroundings with just the right touch of embarrassment proper to the occasion. Her faint flush, little confused laugh, and

the shyly grateful glance out of her dark eyes, as with slightly quickened breathing she put her slim hand into Feddon's, delicately hinted at a past intimacy open to misunderstanding. It was as if she made this the opportunity formally to acknowledge his chivalrous protection of her at a time when the man who was now her husband was prevented by circumstances from claiming that privilege. So, one would imagine, a princess, lately come to her own, might greet and present to her proper lord the sword-sundered partner of her bed in a proxy bridal, hastily arranged at the time of a nation's peril. While her light fingers shot flame through him, Feddon felt that it would have been all in the picture if he had stooped to kiss her curved wrist. She glanced timidly from his face to her husband's, as if to say, "Here is the man the world says ought to have been my husband; and, indeed, outside our perfect union, he of all the world comes nearest to my heart—*our* heart, rather, since we have but one between us." Her fluttered manner was a pretty plea for leave to continue a friendship which a less confident husband might have hesitated to allow. She was even dressed as if to receive not a caller but an intimate. Feddon had never before seen her in the loose-fitting gown of China silk, the colour of "pussy-palm," and as his eyes jealously took in every detail of her person, he understood that it would have seemed like coquetry if she had put on a frock that he had chosen or admired. Yet, as she leaned forward in sitting down, he saw from under the open-work at her throat the gleam of amethysts, and he knew that,

whether from real sentiment or an unbelievable subtlety of provocation, the slender square-linked chain which had been her mother's, and which she had worn on the day she asked him to suffer with her the shadow of implied guilt, lay between her breasts.

Palliser put into the manner of his welcome thanks which he was compelled to leave unsaid. Dick wondered exactly how Evelyn had explained him to her husband, exactly what part he was expected to play in this comedy, heartbreaking for him. She knew her lines, and presumably Palliser took his on trust from her; but for Dick himself it was all a matter of surmise, intuition, implication; the picking up of cues meaningless without the context they knew but he did not. At first he thought, ruefully, that Evelyn might have warned him in her letter the precise lie he was to act, but he presently recognised that a woman of her temperament was unlikely to lie crudely, and would leave the onus to him. Evidently Palliser, like everybody else, knew the facts of their association, but Dick must back her up in the creation of the right atmosphere. This, he gathered little by little, was that of the generous boy who had come to her aid out of chivalry, and afterwards imagined himself in love with her, but who was now quite cured, and recognised that her putting him on one side in favour of an earlier lover unexpectedly come to life was, though at first resented, only natural, and in the result admitted to be the best thing in the world for all concerned. He must continue to suggest an emergence out of sulks, and a disposition to laugh

at his pretensions now frankly seen to be absurd. Everything seemed to go smoothly on this assumption, though one thing still puzzled him. Palliser's unexpected return had, as Archdale argued, re-established a previous sentimental claim, but he understood less than ever why Evelyn had not told him at the time. The task would have been painful, of course, for any woman, but he could not reconcile Evelyn's shirking the duty with his conception of her character. He was all the more perplexed because it was evident that he was expected to behave as if all along he had known of Evelyn's early love affair with Palliser, and as if he were familiar with Palliser's writings, of which he had never read a line. He was, in fact, to make his acquiescence more convincing by playing the reverent disciple.

"We were reading a review of Tony's last book just before you came," said Evelyn. "I don't know which are funnier, the misunderstandings of those who praise or blame him. On the whole I think he suffers most from his appreciators, don't you?"

She handed him the magazine with a glance that he interpreted as a hint to play the game. The mental effort of reading the article cooled him a little, and it was with something of Evelyn's own gaiety that he turned to Palliser, saying—

"I can't help sympathising with the reviewer. He's got to say something, and it's a terrible thing to have to say something which places you for ever on one side or the other of intelligence. It's a case of the reviewer reviewed."

They flung the subject about, twisting it this way and that. As is usual with persons who are aware of delicate ground, from nervousness they now and then came upon it with references to Draycote people, in which, though their names were not mentioned, Dick's mother and the Dean were felt to be apparent, so that conversation was a little feverish and high-pitched and laughs more frequent than seemed quite natural. Dick saw that Palliser had a wholly humorous view of persons who supposed him either a profligate or the dupe of a designing woman, though he fancied, too, that Palliser wanted to assure himself that beyond the break-up of his home-life he had not suffered more than a boy's disappointment in the affair. Palliser's obvious reassurance was the measure at once of Dick's capacity as an actor and of the extent to which Evelyn had deceived her husband. Dick had learned enough of Palliser from Archdale and his own observation to see quite clearly that the success or failure of his marriage with Evelyn depended exactly upon his never knowing that he had married her under a misapprehension. Evidently Palliser had not a spark of jealousy in his nature; whatever Dick's relations with Evelyn had been, for him did not matter at all; everything, for him, depended upon the terms of their parting. As a result Dick felt a sort of protective kindness to Palliser: something of the feeling one man might have towards another whose life he had saved.

Granting the flaw in its foundation, everything proclaimed this marriage triumphantly right. There

was certainly no opportunity for the thought that Evelyn had made a mistake. Dick was frankly amazed at the change in her: all her old restlessness had disappeared, the lines of petulance were gone from her mouth, there was peace in her dark eyes, and she was less thin than she had been. Subtle changes in the doing of her hair, a new neatness in her dress, all these details went to make up a convincing picture of the woman who had found herself through the right man. "The lineaments of gratified desire" were there undoubtedly. Even the room in which they sat, containing the significant signs of two temperaments expressing themselves happily side by side, each unhindered by the other, his books, her music, spoke of an active alliance more sure than the most perfect compromise. He and she were more themselves for being one.

Palliser's over-elaborate apology, the explanation of a man not given to explaining, for leaving the room while he answered a letter, made Dick suspect a deliberate piece of delicacy for which he did not thank him. He did not in the least misinterpret Evelyn's intention when she rose from her chair and came agitatedly towards him, but he involuntarily drew himself up and faced her with cold, set features. She hesitated, flushed, and dropped her eyes, but made brave by some good instinct born of her own happiness, looked up again and stood her ground. She could not speak for a moment, and then—

"What can I say, Dick?" she asked with quivering lips.

"There's nothing to be said," he answered coldly.

"But you will try to forget, dear, won't you?" she pleaded, her hand on his arm.

"It is because I shall never forget that you need not be afraid."

She took her hand away and her eyes filled with tears.

"Yes," she said softly, "I suppose I deserve even that."

"Well, if you were not afraid, why did you write, then?" he asked brutally, half understanding her, but prompted by that strange perversity of love to wound the thing he loved.

"Until I had spoken with you I was afraid, but as you know quite well I am not at all afraid now," she answered him humbly. "I want——"

He completed the sentence for her.

"You want me to cheer up?" he said. "But I assure you I've quite a reputation as a Merry-Andrew. You don't seem to have followed my recent career: don't you read the ha'penny papers?"

She kept back her tears, and even laughed with a wry mouth.

"Haven't you heard me say that I can forgive anything but a criticism of my intelligence?"

"Isn't it a defect of intelligence to try to be—kind?" he said gravely.

"Yes—to try," she answered eagerly; "but, Dick, won't you believe that—I know you'll not misunderstand me—that I love you very dearly?"

He recognised the extreme compliment to himself but also the barrier it implied. Only a woman given body and soul to another man could have said so much

in such a moment. And after all one does not love to be told of one's virtues.

"No, I'll not misunderstand you, Evelyn," he said drily, "but I'd rather have your hate."

"Is there nothing I can do, Dick?" she asked wistfully; "I would do almost anything you asked."

A line out of *Faustine* sounded in his ears and almost came to his lips, but he checked himself in time.

"No," he said, "there's nothing you can do for me. I'm quite well off."

"Indeed, Dick," she said, flushing, "I respect you too much to think of that."

"How pitilessly you respect me, Evelyn!" he said.

She was silent for a little while, with drooped head, picking idly at the lace on her breast. He wished eagerly for the end of their tête-à-tête. All the old sway of her bodily beauty returned; her curious unwholesome charm, the magic of slow moving eyes, low, drawling voice and fragrant hair. He was too young and too innocent to know that only satiety can kill what disillusion cannot, and that it was the loss of her that made all other women impossible for him, but he did begin dimly to understand the more terrible ways of love: the love that leads to slaying, and the strange, sad joy a man may know in possessing a woman who does not love him. Perhaps Evelyn understood something of his torture, for, as she raised her head with the single word "Dick!" in a broken voice, she coloured deeply over her face and neck. But she suffered him to take her hand without any sign of fear. He just touched her fingers with his lips and murmured—

"You need not worry about me, Evelyn, but for Love's sake don't be kind."

Palliser's childlike satisfaction in seeing them together made Dick feel the older man of the two. Not less than Palliser's faith in his wife must be preserved Palliser's faith in him. Palliser set him on a height that made him ashamed, for he knew now that his first protection of Evelyn had not been so disinterested as he had supposed. Away out of sight running through it all had been the hope of reward. Never so surely had he known that as now; and further, he knew that whatever choice Evelyn had finally made between him and Palliser there had been a time when only himself had kept her from him. He had given her untouched to Palliser, but not for Palliser had he foregone his opportunity.

When Dick took his leave Palliser followed him to the foot of the stone staircase. Dick waited apprehensively for the speech which was evidently troubling him. Palliser stood on the step with his hands in his pockets, a tall, tense, grey figure with wide-open eyes staring fixedly across the road.

"There's one thing that worries me, Feddon," he said. "Frankly, I'm not going to say that I'm sorry for the break-up of your Draycote associations. I feel sure that you were in a false position and that if you had continued in your—ecclesiastical work—your talents would not have had fair play. Sometimes the best thing that can happen to a man is to be—turned out?"

Dick agreed, with a laugh.

"But your mother," said Palliser, turning his

startled blue eyes suddenly upon him. "One ought to sacrifice a great deal for one's mother. I understand her point of view, I—in a way—sympathise with her. Of course the ideas she represents have got to go, but one's mother is not the subject one would choose to be the victim of progress. Is there nothing that can be done? Would it be any use if I went to see her, or wrote? You see, Feddon, I feel responsible. You broke this most sacred tie, not consciously for me, it is true, but on behalf of the woman I love—of my wife."

The transparent simplicity of the man made it impossible for Dick to take offence. Half sadly amused at the thought of an interview between his mother and Palliser, he thanked him, but said that there was nothing to be done.

"The clash had to come, sooner or later," he said, "unless I deliberately turned my back on what I felt to be the right way."

As Dick walked away he felt as if things had somehow cleared up for him. He had faced the difficult ordeal and he knew now how he must wear his armour; the weak places, the joints he must mould and temper.

Palliser watched him out of sight and returned to his wife.

"My dear," he said, placing his hands on her shoulders, "it must have been trying for you, but it has taken a great weight off my mind. He is quite cured: it was, as you say, a boyish fancy. He is a splendid fellow, and I hope he will give us the honour of his friendship."

CHAPTER XVIII

ARTHUR PAGET called upon Feddon by night on his way home from the Archdales'. The young man was in a state of nervous irritability: his boyish cheeks were mottled red-and-white, his eyes bright and strained against tears, and his voice squeaky with excitement. He would not sit down, he apologised for disturbing Feddon at his work, he was, in fact, only going to stop for a minute. Archdale, it seemed, had strongly advised against the publication, at Paget's own expense, of his first volume of verses; and Rose had backed her father up—though, said Paget, with a momentary impressiveness contrasting oddly with his generally disorganised condition—Selwyn, the new and very artistic publisher of *belles-lettres*, was quite keen on having the book. Some half dozen of the poems had already been printed in magazines — Feddon would remember them, of course?—but the rest were new, and all written under the inspiration of Rose Archdale.

Feddon put his papers together, said something sympathetic to Paget, who was fuming up and down the room with his hat and overcoat on and an unlighted cigarette betwen his fingers, and persuaded him to sit down. Paget's agitation, even for a person of his vanity, seemed rather beyond the

subject, and Feddon mildly suggested that Archdale could have no motive but kindness and that probably his judgment was not to be despised.

"Oh yes, he knows all about workmanship, he's a good critic," said Paget impatiently; "and he was tremendously complimentary about things here and there. But he's such a cold-blooded old brute: he doesn't seem to feel the emotional significance of the whole collection. It's passion and fervour that makes things live: there's time enough to prune and polish when one gets old and disappointed. But of course I shall have to take Archdale's advice."

Dick began to understand, and a whisky-and-soda, and a little sympathetic digging in the shallow soil of Paget's mind disclosed the fact that he was less concerned about the fate of his poems themselves than at losing the opportunity for dedicating them to Rose Archdale.

"Well," said Dick, "if Archdale thinks that you can afford to wait——"

"But don't you see, Feddon," cried Paget, "by that time she may meet somebody else. At present there's nobody, I'll swear to that; but a girl like her is not going to be overlooked. Everything depends on impressing her imagination while I have the field to myself. That's the worst of living in a beastly sordid age like this: there are so few things a man can do to prove his devotion."

Nobody understood him, he said. He was having trouble with his people: they wanted him to go into the governor's office. It wasn't a question of money, he explained, with an apologetic blush; his people

were quite well off, but they thought he ought to do something practical. What was the good of stewing his brains over law books when he had it in him to produce great poetry? He admitted that he was a loafer, but then he was a fertile loafer, "he liked a broad margin to his life." Frankly, he didn't expect or wish to make any money out of his poetry. Why need he? Art ought to be a gift. He was not extravagant in his tastes: his ideal of life was a cottage in the country where he could keep fowls and pigs and live close to Nature. Then he could run up to town for a month or two every year, to rub pollen. But he must have sympathy and appreciation. That was why he got on so well with Feddon—Feddon was sympathetic.

"Talking of sympathy—that reminds me," he said, with a quick change of tone, "the Pallisers were there to-night. I don't quite know what to think about him. Nothing of the great man, and yet unapproachable somehow, cold, difficult to talk to; he listens, but seems to make everything you say sound threadbare. It's like trying to sing out of doors, or dance by daylight. *She's* sympathetic if you like, and extraordinary pretty—for a little woman. I say, Feddon," he continued, with an embarrassed look, "I'm afraid you'll think me an awful worm; there were stories about you and Mrs. Palliser, and I sort of believed them, but I understand perfectly now. By Jove, old chap, it was a fine thing to do! I might have known that you were too self-centred, too wrapped up in music ever to fall in love. I wish I had your temperament, Feddon. I suppose you've

never lost a night's sleep over a woman in your life? Anybody with half a grain of intelligence can see that Palliser and his wife are simply devoted to each other. She's charming; I had quite a long talk with her and she asked a lot about you. Curious, to see her and Rose together. I don't fancy Rose cares for her very much—that may be because she's Palliser's wife—but she's tremendously taken with Rose. Hangs about her in a wistful sort of way as if asking for friendship. But that's just it: everybody seems to lean on Rose—she's that sort."

He got up and feverishly paced the room.

How was one to penetrate her divine coldness? He could swear she was not wanting in heart, but she guarded it so jealously. She summed up all lovableness and all loving—all those qualities which men—particularly weary men—most desired. Staunchness, reliability, clear common-sense, and above all, sympathy. How was it that Feddon could get on without feminine appreciation? Music must be a more mechanical art; less personal, less dependent on moods. For himself he could not work without sympathy. It was not a good thing, he was convinced, for artist to marry artist: genius ought to mate with character, and Rose was character incarnate. She would spur a man on to do his very best. Not the sort of woman to spoil a man by holding him with caresses: her favours would never be lightly given—they must be won. He was so glad she was not little: he could never love a little woman. He liked tall, deep-breasted, statuesque women with serene eyes. Did Feddon know that sonnet of Ver-

laine's, so beautifully translated by whom he could not remember ?—

> "And hers the glance of many a sculptured head,
> And hers for voice, grave and remote and mild,
> The voice of all dear women that are dead."

But how was he to learn the secret way to her heart? She was so enigmatic, sphinx-like, with her level brows and veiled eyes. She was like some dryad, always ready to slip into her oak and pelt the pursuer with acorns. Whenever one began to talk intimately she laughed.

Feddon must play for him. He ran feverishly through Dick's music, picking out a piece here and there: the *Chanson Triste* of Tschaikowsky, and that cool, cool *Andante* out of the *Sonata Appassionata* with the variations which, he said, sounded like church-bells coming over the fields to a man who had flung away his youth.

"I say, Feddon," he said when they parted, long after midnight, "you might speak nicely about me to the Archdales. Archdale thinks a lot of you, I know, and a word from you would go a long way with him. And Rose too; she says you will never talk to her, and you don't seem to hit it off somehow, but I believe she rather likes you. I know she admires you tremendously."

"But, my dear chap," objected Feddon, "a man must make his own running with a girl."

"Oh yes, of course," admitted Paget. "Still you could find out whether she cares for me. And then a girl thinks a lot of what one man says of another.

If you want to find out what a girl is, ask other women, and *vice versâ*," he advanced oracularly; continuing, "Archdale knows all about my people and so on, but he doesn't see me in my private life, so to speak. You know how I live, that I'm straight, and clean, and all that. Besides," he added, "the Archdales think you rather stand-offish: I'm sure they'd be glad if you went there oftener and made yourself more at home. Of course," he said with a laugh, "I'm speaking from a selfish motive, but you really could help me on a bit, old man."

The next Sunday afternoon Dick found an opportunity to talk to Rose. She made room for him on the broad window-sill with a pleased flush and smile. He thought that she was looking thinner than when he last saw her, and that the curves of her always wistful mouth were settled into an expression of melancholy. In a quite disinterested way he admitted that though few persons would call her pretty, one here and there besides Paget might call her beautiful. The long clean lines and tender curves of her figure, and the meditative poise of her closely-braided, almost golden head, gave her a look of dignity beyond her years. Looking at her as she sat, a little forward and hugging her knee, he had the curious thought that a child playing on the floor at her feet would have completed and explained the meaning of her attitude and expression. She gave him a quick sidelong glance from under her level brows, and he fancied that she stiffened slightly when he spoke of Paget, though she took him up glibly enough.

"I'm afraid he took my father's advice rather hard, didn't he?" she said. "But don't you see that it put my father in rather a difficult position? People won't understand his passionate honesty about everything connected with literature. He's had protégés, but they've always been of his own choosing. Not that he thinks poorly of Mr. Paget's verses: he believes that he'll do something some day, but at present he says it's impossible to make any prediction. He'd be glad to do anything he could to help him but he's a little shy of making himself responsible. He doesn't think it quite fair to Mr. Paget, for one thing."

She spoke so plausibly that Dick felt sure she had wilfully misunderstood his allusion to Paget. He went on to explain that he wasn't thinking about Paget's poetry just then, but about Paget.

"A little odd, isn't it, that you should make the distinction?" she said with a slow smile. "I fancy he wouldn't like it."

"Perhaps not," he admitted, "but then I'm frankly an outsider where books are concerned. Anyhow, I like Paget; he's so fresh and unspoiled."

"That sounded a little defiant," she said; "what have I done to Mr. Paget?"

Dick had thought that he was managing very cleverly, but he now saw that he had underrated her. He had supposed her intelligence, not shallow it is true, but of a nice even depth all over, so that a man could see where he was going. He had learnt something about women, but he was still inclined to separate them into Evelyn Palliser and the rest, giving her a monopoly of mystery. Suddenly aware of unknown depths

and baffling shoals where he had looked for simplicity, he went warily and talked in a vague manner about the charm of youth.

"When everybody's so bored and worldly wise, enthusiasm and singleness of purpose are worth having," he said.

"Worth having for whom?" she asked, resting her serious eyes upon him. He took it for a challenge, and decided that it was a moment for plain-speaking.

"I've reason to believe," he said, "that what you think is a matter of great consequence to Paget."

She laughed softly.

"Oh, if you only want to know what I think," she said. "Well, for one thing, I'm not sure that Mr. Paget's enthusiasm isn't chiefly astonishment at his own cleverness. No; don't tell him that. You may tell him," she said, with a sly glance at him, "that he has my best wishes for his future welfare."

He looked at her reprovingly. He did not understand that she was affronted by the idea of the wrong man peeping and prying by proxy into the secrets of her nature which would have been open as the chalice of a flower to the right man had he been able and willing to use his eyes, and so he thought her flippant and uncharitable.

"It hasn't occurred to you, that sometimes young men are sensitive?" he asked gravely.

"Then why do they go about craving sympathy?" she retorted. "Don't think that because I consider Mr. Paget rather indiscreet I should take pleasure in hurting his feelings. Both my father and I like him

very much, and he knows he's always welcome here, but somehow I don't like him any better for your championship. No," putting out her hand with an involuntary gesture, and afterwards colouring, "I don't mean that, quite, but you have put the unpleasant idea in my mind that he asked you to talk to me about him. He did, didn't he?"

Dick laughed and shook his head.

"Have I failed so badly as that?" he asked. "Seriously, Miss Archdale, I believe you could be the making of Paget if you chose."

"That's a grave responsibility," she said, "because Mr. Paget finished might not meet with the approval of the person or persons most concerned. Besides, isn't the manufacture of young men the last resort of the disappointed woman?"

He sternly disregarded her last remark as mere coquetry. He did not know that under her outside calm she was breathlessly dodging him, fearful lest she betrayed herself, and unconsciously he put himself on the side of his own sex as against women.

"It's a responsibility that women ought to consider a privilege," he said.

"And for which they must thank you men? Possibly; but I think a girl should be allowed to choose her own subject."

"Well, you can't expect men to stand in a row like wall-flowers at a dance. Youth is impetuous."

"To the extent of using its friend as ambassador?" she said, rising. Then she looked at him gravely and added, "Don't think me too horrid and frivolous, Mr. Feddon. Arthur Paget is a very nice boy, and if I

were inclined to take up a hobby I could not do better than choose a person capable of inspiring such friendship."

Being only a man, he was left with the general impression that she thought Paget lacking in enterprise.

CHAPTER XIX

During July the *St. Augustine* music was played for the first time by the excellent amateur orchestra of an artistic community which had grown up round a well-known professor of painting in a village some twenty miles out of London. Everybody who was anybody was there, and Dick would have been less than human if he had not felt elated by the enthusiastic reception of his work by people whose praise was worth having. Yet after it was all over, and in the exhaustion following over-strained nerves, he had the little nagging thought that he was not enjoying his triumph as much as he ought, and the reason, as he bitterly knew, was the presence of Evelyn Palliser in the theatre. He was ambitious and he liked applause, but from the moment he caught sight of her white-clad figure in the dim-lit and fast-emptying auditorium, ambition seemed pointless and applause hollow. She reminded him of the kind of happiness he had missed, and he wished that for just that evening she had not been there. Perhaps, unknown to himself, he was beginning to rebel against her influence, to ask why she must forever spoil the flavour of life for him.

Almost as if she were aware of his questioning mood, Evelyn left her husband's side and came up to

him, impulsively holding out both hands with excited congratulations. She was the kind of woman that improves under emotion, and as if to insist upon what he had lost she was to-night looking her best: tingling with vitality to her finger-tips, translating the appeal of the now silent music into a rosy incandescence. Now for the first time since leaving Drayeote he saw her in the intimacy of evening dress, and her dusky head took on a new and unfamiliar beauty from the white gown she wore. She spoke pantingly, with eager parted lips, her dark eyes were blazing, her cheeks glowing, and her slender body quivered with excitement. Never had she looked so desirable. He saw that she noticed his depression and that she was eager to persuade him that he was happier than he thought: but he saw, too, that her peculiar and perverse vanity could not resist claiming her share in his success. It was she that had concentrated his powers and thrown him into work for a refuge; but, as her eyes told him, she would not be satisfied with the idea that he worked merely for relief, to ease himself. He owed it to her to show a more active appreciation of the success she had helped him to. And yet he felt sure that she would not have liked him to be whole-heartedly joyous. What she desired of him was a mixture of gratitude for inspiration and enjoyment of the result, just touched with regret because what was for him the finer essence of success, herself, could never be his.

Feddon could not, without noticeable rudeness, avoid travelling back to town with Evelyn and her husband. Once in the train her excitement gave

way to an alluring languor. The colour ebbed from her cheeks and her eyes were mysterious in the golden pallor of her face under the lamp; her voice grew drowsy and her whole body seemed to relax as she lay back in the corner of the carriage opposite Feddon. The night was warm, and she had flung aside her white wraps and her half-unclosed hands rested idly at her sides. She might have sat for a figure of surrender. Feddon desperately tried to keep up a conversation, but only Palliser answered; describing his emotions under the music as only the unmusical man can; and presently he also stretched himself in his corner and was silent.

The close intimacy of the first-class carriage, and the memory of the last railway journey he had taken with Evelyn, gave Dick all the torments of the unsuccessful lover. His jarred nerves were sensitive to the contrast between what she had given him and what she had given Palliser. His imagination spared him nothing. His mental vision followed Evelyn home with her husband, he saw them enter their flat, close doors and drink coffee with the leisureliness of security, of possession. There would be no hasty, snatched caresses; they could afford to wait. He listened to their languid discussion of the evening, their dispassionate references to himself. He knew Evelyn's slow, luxurious nature. She would lie back in a deep chair with Palliser perhaps at her feet: he could hear her little sleepy laugh and see the maddening upward stretch of her arms.

Once her eyes opened and rested on his, sombrely

staring at her. As if she had read his thoughts, she looked down in confusion, and a faint colour crept into her ivory cheeks. The stirring of her breast showed some emotion, but Dick never for an instant flattered himself as to its character. She moved uneasily, and drew her swansdown cloak together. It was quite obvious that she pitied him.

His irritated feelings became concentrated into anger against Palliser. He wished that without betraying Evelyn to her husband it had been possible to quarrel with him; to arouse his jealousy. There was something indelicate in his complaisance: he must be either a colossal egoist or else extraordinarily stupid.

The other parts of the train happened to be crowded, and at Wembley Park there was a little altercation on the platform outside their compartment. A woman's voice, high-pitched but grotesquely dignified, was loud in argument. Evelyn opened her eyes and sat up listening: as if unconsciously she put her hand on the door and looked warningly at Dick.

"No," he said with a laugh, "we don't want anybody else in here."

The door was pulled half open with Evelyn's hand still holding on to it, while her face looked inhospitably out on the platform. Palliser at the far end of the carriage roused himself and murmured, "Oh, let her come in."

"Well, get in, then," said a porter's voice wearily, as if he were glad of an excuse to give up the argument, "but there's room in the thirds forward."

In a mingled atmosphere of wood-violets and whisky Mrs. Kemp thrust her way into the compartment. She was dressed, nearly enough to the latest fashion to be grotesque, in heliotrope, and wore a good deal of jewellery, and she carried a silver-mounted parasol and a reticule. As the train started she sat down with a jerk between Dick and Palliser. Then she gave a little snort of triumph over her victory, and looked severely round the compartment. Evelyn had closed her eyes and lay back in her corner as if asleep, with her wraps drawn closely round her. She had gone very white and her breathing showed embarrassment.

Mrs. Kemp stared at her for a few seconds, and then leaned forward and touched her on the knee.

"Oh, good-evenin'," she said with mim-mouthed affability.

Evelyn opened her eyes and looked at her with a foolish attempt to seem doubtful of her identity.

"You remember Mrs. Kemp?" said that person, her voice shrilling up to a ludicrous squeak in the effort to speak soberly, "you are Mrs.—Mrs.—there you have the advantage of me, you see!" She laughed spitefully. Evelyn maintained a fascinated stare at her, moistening her white lips. Palliser bent forward with his hands on his knees and a pitying look in his eyes. The saddest thing in the world, he had once said, was a drunken woman. He had recognised Mrs. Kemp now and was compassionately interested.

"No wonder," said Mrs. Kemp, balancing herself, "that you wanted to keep me out." She pointed to

the three in succession. "Quite a happy family," she said.

Evelyn made the mistake of trying to be conciliatory.

"How are you, Mrs Kemp?" she said, putting out her hand. "I was half asleep when you came in, and I did not recognise you for the moment."

"Don't mention it, ma'am; the mistake was mine," said Mrs. Kemp, with a wink which distorted the whole of one side of her face. She fumbled in her reticule and produced a silver-mounted spirit-flask. "That," she said, holding it up, "was given me by the late Lady Donald Ramsay, now Mrs. Howes, for services rendered — twiggy vous? 'Barber,' she said, when the case was over, 'you are a person of discretion.' Discretion is my strong point," and she winked again. "Can I persuade you to take a little refreshment, ma'am?"

"No, thank you, Mrs. Kemp," said Evelyn pleasantly, "we are just going home to supper."

"Meaning him," said Mrs. Kemp, pointing to Dick, "or him," indicating Palliser, "or both?"

Palliser was looking at his wife with a sympathetic smile. He admired her tact and self-control. Most women, he thought, would have infuriated the wretched creature with a disgusted refusal. Dick held his breath: everything, he thought, depended upon Palliser's keeping Mrs. Kemp in a good temper.

The train stopped at Willesden Green. Palliser made his first mistake. "Would you like to change carriages, dear?" he asked his wife. Dick touched

her foot and opened the door; but she, as if fascinated by the evil woman, glanced from one to the other and said—

"No, I don't think so: it hardly seems worth while for the distance we have to go."

The train moved on again.

"Then," said Mrs. Kemp, replacing the flask in her satchel, "I was right, and young Softy did get left. All right: Alfred owes me a new jacket. . . . If Alfred was a man," she said, flaring up suddenly, "he wouldn't have allowed me to be insulted by a lot of dirty porters; but he would get into a smoker to finish his beastly pipe." She turned and addressed herself with animation to Palliser, who had again settled in his corner and taken a book out of his pocket. "Now look here, Mr.—Mr.—can't think of your name, though I know it's something distangy, not like young Softy's, here, which always reminded me of biting cotton. Fedd'n, Fedd'n," she pronounced reflectively. "Well, Mr. What-d'you-call-it, Alfred never did think me good enough for his people, and this is the last time you catch me going to see his fine sister—with her entrée dishes and her claret, though, as I told her, you see nothing but whisky and soda at the best tables nowadays. I'm sorry for poor Tabor, he was Mr. Freddy Lumley's man and she was maid to his mother, and it always struck me as a bit funny that she should have been married off to Tabor just before Mr. Freddy's marriage to Lady Frances Grieve. However, that's Tabor's lookout, and I'm not one to foul my own nest, but I will say this, that I've always kept myself respectable though I was in

five titled families and good-looking at that. Alfred can't say a word against me either before or after I married him. Don't you think, mister, that I'm quite right to stand on my dignity and refuse to be patronised by people like Alfred's sister?"

Palliser bowed and smiled politely, but said nothing.

"Haven't you got a tongue in your head, man?" said Mrs. Kemp sharply.

"Unfortunately, I don't quite understand—" began Palliser nervously.

"Right 'o, Cockie!" shrilled Mrs. Kemp, "you don't: but I do. Wish I could remember your name though. Got it! Palliasse—she's made her bed and she must lie on it. Good for me!" and she rocked to and fro laughing loudly.

Palliser with a look of annoyance turned to his book again.

"I say, Mr. Palliasse," said Mrs. Kemp, leaning sideways and slapping him on the arm, "she's made her bed and she must lie on it."

Palliser put down his book.

"I must ask you not to annoy me, madam," he said, white with anger; "I do not in the least understand what you are talking about."

"No, but I do, and that's the joke of it," said Mrs. Kemp with rising voice; "and so does she, and so does young Softy here. Look at his white face! Why, he could have had her any time he liked if he hadn't been so blasted proper. Man? He isn't a man, he's a milksop. She'd have given him anything he wanted until she saw your name in the paper,—

and that was before her husband gave her the chuck, let me tell you. I didn't tumble at the time; I knew the page and I could almost swear to the column, but I didn't know the paragraph. For the life of me I couldn't understand what was up: if there's anybody who knows when a woman's got a mind to a man it's me, and yet after March the 7th, when she took to feeding on the *Morning Post*, I could see that she wouldn't have let him touch her, not at any price. When you turned up that morning I saw daylight. She had used my Lord Mug, the piano-tuner, as the monkey used the cat's paw, to get the chestnuts—that's you. And serve him right: why didn't he take his chance when it was offered, like a man? Afterwards, when I could see for myself, she as good as told me. Laugh? I hardly knew how to keep my face straight when Softy came to see his dear Evie. I used to hear him talking about 'When we're married.' Well, I made it all right for her: all sorts of dodging and scheming so that he shouldn't know about you, and you shouldn't know about him; and what did I get out of it? Not so much as a silver teaspoon, and I could have given her away at any time. I did feel a bit sorry for Softy when he came for his music that night, and I'd made up my mind to tell him how he'd been had; but he was too sharp for me—I will say that for him. He bluffed me that he'd known all along."

She stopped suddenly, with thoughtful eyes, and licking her thin lips, "Jiminy!" she cried, "perhaps he did? Oh, naughty!" She dug Dick in the side with the handle of her parasol. "You're not so soft

as I took you for," she said admiringly. "That explains the menarge ah twaw, don't you know. Well, there's no accounting for tastes."

She had talked herself into a good humour again, and was putting her hair into place and arranging her veil. Her three listeners had long ago passed the stage of feeling outraged: it was as if the creature's voice came to them from an immense distance, reviving an old scandal which concerned none of them. Palliser was leaning forward with his head on his hand, so that his face was hidden from the other two. Evelyn lay in her corner, huddled in wraps, with closed eyes, looking like a dead woman. Perhaps Dick was the least to be pitied of the three. It all made no difference to him or to his tragic love for Evelyn. It was all an old tale for him, though this was the first time he had heard in plain words the story of Evelyn's deceit. He cursed himself and Palliser for their folly in letting the woman into the carriage; it might all have been so easily prevented. Half an hour ago he had envied Palliser: how he pitied him now. He wondered what Palliser would do. Would he believe and act upon the woman's foul insinuation against himself? That was surely impossible. No sane man could doubt Evelyn's passionate love for and fidelity to her husband. She had done Palliser no wrong.

The train drew up at the station. The noise and the lights were like a new experience, strangely interesting: it was as if they had been travelling for days. Dick felt an irresistible desire to yawn and stretch his legs, as persons do after a long journey.

Mrs. Kemp, perhaps a little awed by the impression she had made, rose to get out.

"I hope I haven't put my foot into it," she said vaguely. "When I get among old friends my tongue runs away with me. If Alfred was a man it wouldn't have happened."

In silence the two men made their preparations for getting out of the train. Evelyn lay still with her eyes closed, and for a moment, thinking that she had fainted, Dick felt alarmed. Palliser touched her on the shoulder; she opened her eyes and looked up into their faces with a fatuous smile on her white lips, as if she were not quite sure which of the two she ought to try to conciliate.

"Come, Evelyn," said Palliser.

She stood up with her arms hanging at her sides, lifting her chin with the curious passivity of a chronic invalid, who has almost forgotten how to put on her own clothes, while Palliser fastened the opera cloak at her throat. She shivered a little when Palliser's cold fingers touched her flesh, but it was evident that if he had threatened to strike her she would not have made any movement to ward off the blow. Dick felt like an intruder upon some private grief of theirs: he wanted to slink away without speaking, and yet he mechanically followed them to their cab because he could not shake off the insane impulse to apologise. Evelyn, he thought, was and had a right to be angry with him for being the involuntary cause of her degradation. It was as if he had been guilty of an act of indecency in her presence.

Palliser put Evelyn into the cab and then stood by

as if waiting for Feddon to precede him. Then, remembering the situation, he hastily got in.

"Good-night, good-night," he said, shaking Feddon's hand with absent-minded fervour. Evelyn did not speak. The cab drove off, leaving Dick standing with his hat in his hand.

CHAPTER XX

THAT most uncomfortable gift of Archdale's for seeing things against his will made him aware that something had gone wrong when Palliser called upon him in the middle of the morning. To Archdale's inner vision Palliser had his marching kit on his back. His cheeks were hollow as if from fever, and the blue flame that only leagues of sea or desert could quench burned in his eyes. He greeted Archdale with a quick nod, looked round the room, singled out the one book which had been added to the shelves since his last visit, and stood reading, with his hat on and his stick tucked under his arm. Archdale sitting humped up in his revolving chair, wrinkled his forehead, patted down his thin, sandy hair, and stared at Palliser out of his watery, hollow eyes. He had not seen Palliser nor his wife nor Feddon for nearly a fortnight, and he guessed that whatever trouble there was lay somewhere between the three. Just as he had got his friends off his mind and nicely going, he thought wearily, one of them jibbed like a bad horse in a team. He had believed Palliser comfortably settled by his marriage; that he saw the logical development and end of Palliser. Afterwards, it struck him as odd that his instincts should have jumped upon Palliser, whom he knew best of the three,

as the one that was jibbing. He watched Palliser anxiously, now, wondering whether he would put the volume back in its proper place. Archdale had his own orderly untidiness. On his desk, besides the blotting-pad, there was nothing visible but a single slip of unlined foolscap. Apparently it was his pride to spin everything out of his own bowels: when you saw Archdale's desk littered with books and papers you might know that his work was not going smoothly.

Palliser put back the book—in its right place—flung his hat and stick on the broad window-sill, and sat down. In that corner of the mind where even the most modest men hide their vanities, Archdale kept records of the occasions when Palliser had asked his advice. Ordinary people asking Archdale's advice did not count. As he said, "They tell me things that I should hesitate to tell my God." Palliser had not come to ask advice now, Archdale surmised, but help; and Palliser asking help was so pathetic a figure that his impatience with the man died away.

Palliser tugged at his beard and stared at Archdale.

"You know I'm going away, Archdale?" he asked abruptly.

Archdale sighed: until Palliser came into the room he had not known. He said so, adding the hope that Palliser was quite sure of his mind.

"Oh yes, I think so," was Palliser's reply, given as indifferently as if he spoke of crossing the road. Archdale wondered what the devil was the matter.

As if he had arranged it himself he had felt all along that Palliser's marriage, magnificent as it was as a piece of natural selection, had the elements of disaster in it; but he could not help thinking that if he had had the opportunity to take Mrs. Palliser in hand for a week before her marriage, this trouble, whatever it was, would not have happened.

"Any plans?" he asked. Palliser laughed gently.

"Well," he said, "I'd like to have a look at Tibet before they turn Lhassa into a health resort."

"Is it so pressing as all that?" said Archdale drily.

"Yes."

Archdale grunted. He was very ill at ease. He felt as if he had the crises of at least three lives put before him. His mind ran on ahead and ahead. The future of Palliser, his wife, and Feddon—oh, such a terrible lot depended upon Palliser's going away! Afterwards, he was to know that there was a fourth life involved. He did not greatly care for Evelyn Palliser, but she interested him profoundly, and he knew, better than she knew herself, that Palliser was her chance. Perhaps the first article of Archdale's creed was that everybody ought to have their chance. He wanted to protest against Palliser's going away, but the impossibility of giving the right reason for protesting kept him from saying anything stronger than—

"You're looking as fit as a fiddle, Palliser: why not let well alone?"

"Oh, the call came," said Palliser, with the grim laugh of a man who recognises his own weakness.

It was on Archdale's lips to say "You're a liar: you're not called, but driven."

"Bad time to go to Tibet," he said aloud. Palliser shrugged his shoulders.

"Oh, Tibet's only a manner of speaking," he said, "it might be Persia."

"Now, this," thought Archdale, "is serious, proving emphatically that he's driven. He wants to get away from his wife." He moved impatiently in his chair, cursing the convention which would not allow him to ask plain questions. Palliser's troubled manner made him hope that some sort of confidence was coming, and seeing Palliser feel in his pockets, he flung him a tobacco-pouch and cigarette papers, saying carelessly, "Anything I can do?"

"No, I think not, thanks," Palliser said. He rolled a cigarette, bending the paper at the ends without sticking it. When he had struck a match he looked up, saying, "At least, not till after I'm gone. Then you might make things as lively as you can for Evelyn while I'm away. Rose—she's out I suppose?"

Archdale took the tobacco-pouch which Palliser handed back to him, opened it, shook down the contents and folded it neatly before he returned it to his pocket.

"Yes, she's out," he said regretfully. He had been thinking "If Rose were ten years older, knew all about Mrs. Palliser, and was left alone with Palliser for half an hour, she could tell him things which would send him home like a corrected schoolboy." Only a woman could do justice to another woman's

crooked attempts to work out her destiny; could make a man feel the terrible pity of it.

"How does your wife like the idea, Palliser?" he asked briskly.

"She thinks it's best for me to follow my bent," he replied. "We're quite agreed about that. But I'm just a little afraid she'll be dull; and I thought that if Rose would look her up occasionally, and you, —you see, Archdale," he added, with a nervous laugh, "the number of enlightened people is rather limited."

Archdale reserved his sympathy, though he recognised that Palliser must be hard hit somewhere to plead so piteously for kindness to his wife.

"How long are you going to be away?" he asked.

"That's quite uncertain," said Palliser quickly; "not less than a year anyhow."

It seemed to Archdale as if after all the years of their friendship he had only now come down upon the radical defect of Palliser's temperament; the anomaly which in itself was a destructive criticism of his whole philosophy. You may live with some lunatics for a lifetime without getting a hint of their delusions except as betrayed in some trivial habit. The very reticence of a man, usually so candid, was proof of the ineradicability of his mental vice. Archdale remembered Rose's remark, "There's a numbed spot in his heart or brain, somewhere. . . . I think he could be very cruel on principle." He was convinced, now, that Palliser was leaving his wife against her will and for an indefinite time upon some theoretical difference, and he could make a pretty shrewd guess at what had

happened. Probably, he thought, Palliser had found out that she had lied to him, and all her love, her loyalty, her fine disregard of public opinion went for nothing. His punctilious insistence upon sincerity was as merciless as the mere "goodness" he ridiculed in other people. Archdale found that he was beginning to despise Palliser: whatever had happened, his desertion of his wife, now, was sheer cruelty: she would bleed from a thousand torn fibres. "It's like taking Christ away from the repentant thief," thought Archdale bitterly.

"This going away," he said; "you're quite sure you've slept on it, Palliser?"

"It's quite settled that I am going away," said Palliser, rather stiffly. "Evelyn is keeping on the flat, and she will have Margaret for company. Margaret is more a friend than a servant."

The two men were silent for a little while. In spite of Palliser's haggard look Archdale could not feel sorry for him. "He's martyring himself for a punctilio," he thought. His pity was all for Evelyn.

Both men were conscious of a coldness between them. The few trite sentences they had spoken, sentences which, however, betrayed rather than concealed the emotional prejudices behind them, marked the crisis of a friendship hitherto so easy and instinctive that it had never been questioned or explained. Each had, as it were, newly discovered the point of stress in the other's nature, and recognised that it was incompatible with perfect sympathy. They looked regretfully one at the other, and Archdale only needed a little more courage to get up, put

his hand on Palliser's shoulder and say, "What is it, old friend?" But in a very curious way the woman stood between them. To be able to forgive the same fault is perhaps the final test of friendship.

Palliser got up to go.

"We'd like you and Rose to dine with us on Thursday," he said, with a touch of formality. "I cross Channel on Friday."

Archdale accepted the invitation absent-mindedly. He was wondering whether Rose would prove worthy of her mother.

Rose coming in from shopping an hour later found her father making diagrams on his blotting-pad.

"What's wrong, old man?" she asked.

"Oh—people," he said.

"Paper, or flesh-and-blood people?"

"Neither — exactly," he said with a whimsical glance at her; "moralists, ethicists, theorists—all the ists."

Rose, sitting bolt upright with her hands in her lap, pursed up her lips reflectively. She looked very cool and self-possessed in her holland frock and panama hat, though, as Archdale could see, there was a good deal going on behind her steady grey eyes. Leaning his head on his hand, he watched her with keen speculation. She had her mother's mouth and chin and fearless carriage of the head, and his knowledge of the turbulent deeps of her mother's nature kept him from mistaking her stillness for indifference.

"Oh, I'm so tired of them all," she said, a slight quiver in her voice betraying more than weariness. "The blunderers are the only ones that matter."

The remark agreed with what was in Archdale's mind. To tell a lie to Palliser was, after all, a fault of intelligence rather than of character. He wondered whether Rose had heard anything about the Pallisers, but did not question her.

"Somebody's been worrying you," she said; "why don't you refuse to see people in the morning?"

"Palliser's been here," he said, as if the personality excused the intrusion; "he's going away."

There was a distinct change in Rose's breathing.

"Is Mrs. Palliser going with him?" she asked eagerly. Archdale threw down his pen and leaned back in his chair.

"No," he said, "that's the devil of it."

"I wonder why Mrs. Palliser isn't going," she said, with a touch of suspicion in her voice.

"Oh, he couldn't very well take her on the long trail," said Archdale weakly.

"Do you know what's happened?" she demanded.

He turned round and looked at her, leaning forward with his delicate hands folded.

"I don't know that it's necessary to conclude that anything has happened, Rose," he said, partly to evade her, partly to find out whether she knew anything that he did not. Rose looked very much disturbed, and a little angry.

"I'm not malicious, father," she said, with heightened colour, "but I can't help thinking that something has gone wrong. It wouldn't be surprising, would it?"

"Ah, Rose dear," said her father earnestly, "wait until you've seen a little more of the world. There

are a lot of things you've got to take on trust, and you've no right to be too hard on women like Mrs. Palliser."

"I don't think I'm hard on her," said Rose, her voice trembling with vexation; "why should I be? She has never done me any harm that I know of. How long is Mr. Palliser going to be away?"

Archdale told her. He was rather puzzled by her interest. She usually showed her dislike of the Pallisers by avoiding their names.

"And is she going to stop in London all the time?" she asked.

He nodded.

"Oh!" she said coldly. Then he supposed that her quick brain had anticipated Palliser's request that they should brighten his wife's loneliness during his absence.

"They want us to dine with them on Thursday," he said, watching her anxiously. "I think," he added, "that Palliser means it as a sort of opportunity for you to be nice to his wife."

Rose said "All right, father" in a non-committal tone, and walked out of the room, swinging the little basket she had brought in from shopping. She went slowly upstairs to her bedroom, locked the door, sat down, and after a short struggle, twisting her hands and gasping for breath, burst out crying. She cried, not with ease or gracefully, but with a contorted face, and long tearing sobs that shook her whole body. Her emotion was as much anger as grief. Her imagination looked further ahead than her father's, and she saw at least one consequence of

Palliser's going away much more clearly than he did. And for her it was the only important consequence. She had met Feddon in the High Street that morning, and had been startled by the change in him. He looked ten years older, and was hurrying along as if pursued by devils, though he stopped and spoke to her with a kind of feverish jocularity, as if he were aware of and would distract attention from his own miserable looks. Now she thought she understood what was the matter. She was not concerned to know what was the difference between Palliser and his wife, but her father's manner convinced her that there was a difference, and she understood perfectly that nothing would confirm Feddon's infatuation like Evelyn's unhappiness. Rose was quite just; she felt sure of Evelyn's passionate devotion to her husband, and she was not afraid that she would try to practise her arts upon Feddon during her husband's absence; but the mere fact that she was suffering would rivet her chains upon him. Lately Rose had fancied that he was beginning to show signs of emancipation: he was lower-pitched, more human, not so desperately afraid of silence, more inclined to let himself go in a natural manner. She appreciated to the full the unconscious irony of her father's wish that she should be kind to Palliser's wife. The more she made of Evelyn Palliser the oftener Feddon was likely to meet her—unless he stayed away from herself; though that he had never shown any leaning to herself hurt her less than his being enslaved by the other woman.

On the Thursday evening Evelyn overacted her

cheerfulness. "These men," she said to Rose, "they'll leave us for a dog-fight any day. But it's better to let 'em go than have them grumbling about the house. Don't you think so?"

She seemed determined not to let her visitors imagine that her husband's going away was unexpected or surprising, and in her anxiety to create the right impression she protested too much. She told Rose all about his previous travels in Africa, showing her his books and photographs and insisting on the value of his observations of native customs, his necessity for perfect independence.

"Of course it's a little trying for me to be left behind," she said, "but I wouldn't have married him on any other conditions. Fancy the horror of being told that you're a hindrance to your husband's career! I can't think how women can sit down quietly under the slight implied in Stevenson's remark that a married man can't afford to be brave or generous. You remember what he says? 'If you want the pick of men and women take a good bachelor and a good wife.' When you marry, Miss Archdale, take care that it's not your fault if your husband is unable to shake the truth of *that*."

But Rose felt all the time that there must be some painful reason for a separation that needed so much explaining. If it had not been for the thought of Feddon she would have felt sorry for Mrs. Palliser. All through the meal she chattered with feverish gaiety, but Rose caught her hungrily watching her husband's face, and noticed that when he was talking about his plans she painfully hung upon his words;

and the girl felt sure that, at any rate for him, the break was so serious that he had not thought fit to take his wife into his confidence.

Archdale noticed one thing that Rose did not; something which gave him a sharp sense of fear. When he shook hands with Evelyn, through the delicate perfume she used he fancied that he caught the odour of alcohol. At the moment he was not disturbed; that she had strung herself up for what must have been an ordeal seemed a sufficient explanation. But two or three times during dinner the idea came back to his mind with an ugly significance. There was only claret on the table, but Archdale fancied something curious and unpleasant not in the quantity of wine Evelyn drank but in the way she drank it; a something eager and sensual. He caught himself watching her glass, which would remain untouched for some time and then appear empty as if it had been suddenly and furtively drained. It was as if she were abandoning herself to a form of consolation, known before, but of late not needed. Archdale wondered whether Palliser noticed. Then he called himself a foolish old woman. Naturally Evelyn wanted to keep her spirits up. He cursed his habit of impertinent observation; his trick of forecasting tragedy. Yet again and again the thought came into his mind: "Palliser is her chance and she'll go to pieces without him."

Palliser's manner to his wife was cruelly considerate. "He's kind to her," thought Archdale; "*kind*, less than a year after a marriage for which she sacrificed every shred of self-respect." He sur-

mised that the invitation was not only to give Rose her opportunity but because Palliser was afraid to spend this last evening alone with his wife; afraid either because he was not sure of his own strength, or because he doubted his power to conceal his moral repulsion from his wife, and wished to avoid wounding her more than was necessary. Archdale regretted that he had come. Perhaps, he thought, if the pair had been left alone this evening so that Palliser could appreciate the full sadness of parting he would have come to a right sense of relative values in his wife's character. It is quite possible that Archdale was mistaken: tragedy is often deeper to the sympathetic onlooker than to the persons concerned. Under ordinary circumstances Archdale would have considered a temporary separation between a husband and wife who found themselves on opposite sides of a scruple, a good thing; but in this case he could not get rid of the idea "she'll go to pieces without Palliser."

It struck Archdale as a little odd, as he and Rose were driving home, that all the evening he had not once thought of Feddon; and it shows the difference between his and his daughter's attitude towards the present situation that his general ideas about Dick Feddon and Evelyn Palliser should have crystallised out into the reflection, "Good God! how she must hate him!"

CHAPTER XXI

Dick Feddon had the exasperating sense that he was a sort of social Jonah. Whenever he came into close relations with his fellow-creatures something seemed to go wrong, and all because he had the misfortune to love a woman who did not love him. He had not seen Evelyn since that nightmare journey after the concert. He had been afraid to go to the Archdales' lest she should be there and suffer the degradation of seeing him. With dumb rage he heard by a side wind of Palliser's departure. He did not pity him now, and if the impossible could have happened, if Evelyn had turned to him for consolation, he would have set honour and discretion on one side and gone to her without a moment's hesitation. The idea that she was in trouble lifted his late more sensual passion into a higher plane, calling out the instinct of chivalry. The thought that he had begun to rebel against her power filled him with remorse. His helplessness to comfort her maddened him; there was nothing to be said or done; it was inconceivable that she should wish to see the man who had, though unwittingly, brought shame upon her.

His work was not now the complete refuge it had been. He had reached a ticklish stage in his career;

he was watched, measured; he must either advance or go backwards. Just at the moment when success was within reach he seemed to lose inspiration and power and he grew timid, afraid to touch his reputation which in dreams appeared to him as an egg. He sat gingerly upon his reputation, fearful of cracking it, yet harassed by the thought that it was addling under his inactivity. The important thing seemed to be not to stop going, but the concise little egg of his present reputation bothered him. What was he to do?

Archdale, coming in in his patient, silent way, answered the question. He sat with his chin resting on his folded hands, supported by his stick, hummed, sniffed, stared at Dick's white, hollow cheeks and said—

"Leave it alone."

"What?" asked Dick blankly.

Archdale made a gesture indicating the piano, the littered writing-table, the whole room, in fact.

"You're not getting enough air or exercise: you're stuffy and your nerves are all wrong," he said.

Feddon told him about the egg. Archdale nodded.

"Blow it," he said, "and hang up the shell. In ten years' time you'll bring your dearest friend and point and whisper, 'Look! that's the thing I was.'"

Dick blushed, threw back his head and laughed.

"I believe you're right," he said, and tore up the scholarly exercise he was engaged upon. "But meanwhile," he asked, "am I to bite my finger ends?"

"No," said Archdale, "you're to come down to Cornwall for three weeks with us. My sister—

Mrs. Warburton, and her husband have discovered the Happy Valley where it's always afternoon and tourists never come. They've taken a furnished cottage for three months, and there's another vacant next door. We shall live on moor trout and scalded cream and sit with our legs in the Atlantic."

So it arranged itself more easily than Archdale had hoped. Dick was in that desperate mood when a man obeys any suggestion that saves him the trouble of thinking, if it is sprung suddenly upon him and pressed firmly. His riotous spirits as they took train from Paddington did not alter Archdale's conviction that he had pulled him away only just in time. They were all in a holiday mood. Rose, in a brown holland frock, outwardly cool and placid, was all simmering with hopes and fears. For once the gods were kind: now if ever was her opportunity. Love, for her, came in the form of a desire to soothe and help: she had no craving for adoration, she did not greatly care whether he loved her or not if he would only submit to her loving. As she furtively watched Feddon's dark, virile face, hawk-featured with compressed lips and bright hazel eyes, she felt that she wanted to take his head on her breast and rock him to sleep like a baby. His restlessness filled her with deep compassion. So long as he was talking he seemed tolerably well, but whenever he was silent a driven look came into his eyes and the haggard lines round his mouth deepened into an expression of complete exhaustion. He seemed to have lost the power of resting. He would settle in the corner with his

thick, white lids closed, but after a few minutes start up again with a laugh of apology. She wanted to lean forward, touch his hand and say, "I understand": anything to get that fever out of his blood.

Dick had agreed to Archdale's proposal at first as a sort of joke, but as they rushed through the shires he began to be touched by the sights and smells of the country. The pale dappled sky, wistful and remote, the veiled distances, the blue and gold, the still warmth and ripe odours of early autumn made a poignant appeal to his senses. All his life he had never been consciously affected by Nature, he had enjoyed beauty without thinking about it; but now, like most unhappy people, he responded with exaggerated sensibility. As if his mind had been suddenly released from a life-long preoccupation, quite simple things had the force of discoveries. Early impressions long submerged came to the surface, bringing with them the associations of a happy childhood. He remembered dew-drenched mornings when he rose early for long hours at the piano; the windows open to the scents of the garden, bees blundering in, and over all the house the hallowing influence of his mother. His had been a solitary childhood haunted with music, enriched with vague aspirations aroused by the occasionally heard works of the great composers brooded over in secret, filled with shy hopes for the time when he, too, should turn his joy of living into exquisite rhythm and harmony. Well, he had in a manner attained to the mere facts of his hopes, but where was the radiant atmosphere that made them alluring? Never again

for him that first rapture of the dawn. His eyes suddenly filled with tears.

He recovered himself at once with a savage movement, and caught Rose Archdale's eyes fixed on his with an expression which first startled and then stung him. It was such a look as a mother might give a naughty child: tender, reproachful, hungering. She coloured deeply and stammered something, nobody heard what. There was a momentary embarrassing silence, and then Dick broke in with some joke about the cows in the field "turning the landscape into milk and beef." It was a good thing to be a cow, he said: that was the true function of all living creatures; unexcitedly to transform the chaotic raw material of existence into definite and concrete symbols. But from that moment he looked upon Rose with new eyes. He had not understood the meaning of her glance, but he felt that she read himself, and he somehow identified her with that rapture of the dawn, that early peace, now denied him.

To-day everything seemed destined to touch his emotions and awaken memories. At Bristol they got out of the train and wandered bare-headed up and down the long, cool, echoing platform. A staring bill with large red letters met their eyes. It was the advertisement of the musical Festival at Weirminster. That seemed to explain the prevalence of parsons and the "festival face." Dick was suddenly pulled up with the thought that this was the other side of it all. Did he regret losing what the bill stood for? He looked down the bill to where should have been his own name and read, "Conductor of the

Festival Choir, Mr. A. Joyce-Bonney." He remembered Mr. Joyce-Bonney, and the name recalled all the associations of his office: the mild humour of the Dean, the patronage of the Dean's wife, teas, garden-parties. Lord, no! He didn't want all that. And yet what was it that he did want that somehow belonged to all this? It came at last, slowly but irresistibly: the idea of his mother. He wanted his mother badly. Why didn't she understand, why wouldn't she understand, he thought passionately. He felt, strangely, just as Archdale had felt with regard to Palliser, that the tall, straight, golden-headed girl at his side could have made matters right between his mother and himself without any sacrifice of dignity to either of them. Now that things had gone so appallingly wrong with Evelyn he was less able than ever to write to his mother and say that she had been just in her judgment of the woman he loved. A line out of Emerson had made a deep impression upon him, "It is impossible for a man to be cheated by anyone but himself." No, Evelyn had not cheated him. She, in spite of everything, was blameless and desirable as ever. So he came back to her always. Would he never be free? For he now recognised that he wanted to be free: he was no longer in love with loving. Love was a disease, a fever in the blood.

He swung round on his heel and watched the people. How cool and contented they all looked. Evidently love did not take all men the same way. Or perhaps most of them were not capable of loving at all. He watched the occasional couples, happy

husbands and wives, with a certain disdain: all, even the most refined, had for him a faint grunting look. The people on the platform had a curious general similarity: they fell into three types; big, clean-faced, wholesome girls striding along with tennis-racquets and shoes, schoolboys, and parsons, many parsons. Presently out of the general impression of white dresses and black coats one figure took shape and familiarity. Dean Maidment detached himself from his two daughters, who turned aside to the bookstall, and advanced delicately with outstretched hand.

"Dick, my boy, I'm so glad to see you. How are you?" he said.

He looked knowingly from Dick to the Festival bill, and Dick cursed the accident which made him stand beneath it; for the Dean's glance was that of one who recognises and welcomes the Prodigal Son. He held his head a little to one side, with his eyebrows raised and his mouth screwed up with a whimsical expression as if to say—

"Well, have you begun to recognise what you threw away?"

Dick greeted the Dean civilly but without effusion. Rose Archdale stood quietly by with half humorous, half indignant appreciation of the encounter. She wanted to say, "He isn't a bit sorry, and you'll never get him back." The Maidment girls, bending their heads over magazines, eyed Rose, whom they remembered by sight, with fearful interest. She was part of that abandoned life they had heard whispered about; she was made more of an awful warning by the fact

that she had been reared almost among themselves. In appearance she had not greatly altered since the days when she taught in Draycote High School.

The Dean made the most of his opportunity. He spoke of Mr. Joyce-Bonney with good-natured appreciation but just the right touch of "not the man we ought to have had" to flatter Dick. He congratulated Dick upon his *St. Augustine* music, and slily pointed out on the bill the title of a new work by a young native composer, to be heard for the first time at the Festival.

"People shan't say that we err on the side of narrowness or timidity," he said with a reckless air. "Of course a few fogeys on the Committee did raise their hands in pious horror when Layland's *Queen of Sheba* was first mentioned, but we overruled them. It was Luther, wasn't it? who said that he didn't see why the devil should have all the good tunes. Though you mustn't suppose that the *Queen of Sheba* is 'tunes': on the contrary, it's quite ultra-Wagnerian—quite. How things have changed! Why, I can remember the time when *The Redemption* was thought operatic and frivolous. It's altogether a mistake to suppose that nowadays the Church is afraid of 'advanced' ideas either in music or anything else," he concluded significantly.

Dick understood the Dean's speech as a hint that he was not to suppose himself too clever for Weirminster, or that he had gained any artistic advantages by cutting himself adrift from the influences of his youth. As if he were following up this train of thought, the Dean said—

"Your mother is wonderful, Dick," in a tone that suggested "Come, come make it up." Dick's face showed nothing, though he was longing to hear more about his mother. As if purposely to tantalise him the Dean spoke of Sherring, not coupling his name with Mrs. Feddon's but suggesting a connection by proximity. "Your old enemy, Mr. Sherring," he called him, with sportsmanlike allusion to Dick's readiness with his hands.

"One of the most intellectual men I've ever met," said the Dean. "Have you heard that he's now a regular Communicant?" Altogether Dick received the impression that in leaving Draycote for London he had drifted into a backwater of progress. Archdale, roused from the bookstall by the Dean's strongly modulated voice, watched the pair with grim amusement. He was quite sure that Feddon was done with the provinciality the Dean represented, that he was blooded of his trade. Bad or good influence Evelyn Palliser had undoubtedly made a man of him, but Archdale just wondered whether Dick was sufficiently able to disentangle the idea of his mother from her accidental surroundings.

The big clock over the bookstall warned the Dean that he had only seven minutes to spare.

"We go on through the Tunnel," he said, as if he delicately spared Dick the painful associations of "We go home." He had not asked Dick where he was going until now.

"Oh, Cornwall!" said the Dean, with rounded mouth and a side-glance at Rose Archdale. Dick suppressed a chuckle. It had not occurred to him

until that moment that Archdale was not obviously of the party. "Miss Archdale," he introduced, and the Dean looked scared, backing away till he almost trod on Archdale's toes. Then Archdale was made known to him, and his scandalised expression changed to one of polite disapproval. He bowed frigidly, looking down his nose. It was evident that, though he did not work it out comprehensively on the spot, to his mind Rose and Dick off to Cornwall unattended had been slightly less improper than accompanied by Archdale. Archdale represented the serious enemy.

So the Dean bowed himself and his daughters away. As Rose remarked, the Maidment girls' backs were more expressive than ever their faces had been. While rushing through the tamer country immediately below Bristol she drew a picture of Dick, ragged, with a fiddle under his arm, staring at the name of Mr. Joyce-Bonney on the Festival bill, while the Dean offered him a penny, with the words "And you might have been a Birthday Knight."

Mr. and Mrs. Warburton, both aggressively tanned and wearing sandals with an air, met them at Porthlew. He was long, lean, and bristling with a newly-grown black beard; she plump and well-liking, confusing Rose's memory of her middle-aged decorum with a dare-devil swing and an unintelligible dialect. Having dwelt in Cornwall for nearly two months they patronised their visitors as "up-country" people, and stared at their luggage with unconcealed contempt. "What on earth made you bring a dress-basket to Cornwall, Rose?" asked her aunt, and intimated that at Penscathe they wore

bathing-dresses or "oilers" and sou'-westers, according to the weather. Warburton expressed disappointment that Feddon had not brought a gun, though, as he said, "Of course you can borrow one from Trevaskis' little boy." During the eight-mile drive in a spring-cart, westward over heather-clad hills, the Warburtons bragged one against the other of the loneliness and privations they enjoyed at Penscathe. It seemed to be a point of honour with them to explain away every person they met on the moorland road, and Warburton descried and laconically named most of the extinct fauna of Britain, running, crawling, or flying in the dusk.

"Don't know what you people are going to eat to-morrow, unless I catch some trout or shoot a rabbit or two," he said carelessly.

"Are there no deer?" asked Archdale in a faint voice, while Rose remarked that she was under the impression that hedgehogs were in season just now. After a quick interchange of amused glances on Porthlew platform the three visitors had silently agreed to indulge the engaging affectations of their hosts. They played the game with spirit, asked whether the Spaniards had burned any villages lately; talked with bated breath about wreckers, and were quite surprised when Warburton admitted that the old woman who was to cook for them would understand English. It was nearly dark when, with many strange cries from Warburton, they zig-zagged down a precipice into a wooded valley resounding with the noise of the Atlantic.

CHAPTER XXII

THE three weeks of golden idleness by the bright blue Cornish sea were possibly made happier for Rose Archdale by the knowledge that from the first her aunt had half-guessed her secret. To everyone but Rose, Mrs. Warburton kept her own counsel, but for these two there were delicious hours in the dusk, of half admissions, delicate innuendoes, hot disclaimers, and soft chuckles over the stupidity of men, particularly men who pride themselves on their powers of observation; all the variations of that dainty game of bluff women are forever playing when two of them are gathered together with a man to talk about.

The idea of Dick's affinity so saturated—in the chemical sense—by Evelyn Palliser, presented him to Archdale's imagination as inert where his daughter was concerned; and as the brother and sister notion appealed to his radical sentimentality, and Rose undoubtedly did Feddon good, he was glad to leave them to amuse themselves in their own way. Mr. Warburton, for his part, was too busy showing-off Cornwall to notice anything else.

There were sailing and fishing, breathless encounters with yard-long pollack, serious stalking of infinitesimal trout in a mimic mountain torrent,

long tramps over the moors or round the cliffs; and so the days flew, each one wearing off a little more of Feddon's outer shell of indifference, so that the boy surviving in him grew daily more apparent. It was as if he were recovering from moral bruises.

His attitude to Rose, entirely that of the good comrade, made it easy for her to hide her feelings from him without being any the less frank in her manner. A single word of sentiment from him would have either moved her to betrayal or frozen her into self-protective coldness. Their adventures on the sea or among the rocks led to an unusual freedom of speech and touch, but he was so completely possessed by the idea of another woman that he never guessed that the quiet grey-eyed girl who took his hand or surrendered herself to his arm in a difficult piece of climbing was at any moment his for the asking.

What in her chiefly appealed to him was her sweet sanity of mind. She was for him part of the gracious influence of this time and place. She had, as Paget remarked on their first introduction to each other, the healing hand, the benedictory brow: she was well summed up in Paget's quotation "equipoised on splendid levels." That remembered phrase brought with it a feeling that he ought to make use of this opportunity to say a good word for Paget. He turned the idea over in his mind for some days with a curious reluctance to put it into speech: he was beginning to think that she was rather too good for Paget. He was quite sure that he was not in the least in love with Rose Archdale himself, but he would prefer to think of

her as always heart-whole and unpossessed. Hadn't Paget himself said that she was not for any one man? Besides, Paget with his fluent platitudes, his feverish whipping himself up into inspiration, seemed absurdly out of this calm, spacious life by the sea to which Rose Archdale so curiously belonged. One couldn't talk about Paget here. It was a sudden conviction of disloyalty to Paget that finally hurried Dick into mentioning his name one evening as he and Rose walked home a little ahead of the others across the moor after a long day's tramp round the coast.

"I can't think what's happened to Paget," he began warily; "I used to see a lot of him at one time, and then he suddenly stopped coming."

Rose looked at him curiously and blushed a little.

"Oh," she said in a surprised tone, "then you hadn't—" she stopped with a little confused laugh.

"Hadn't what, Miss Archdale?" he asked.

"I thought perhaps you had quarrelled," she said lamely, and walking a little faster.

"What on earth should we quarrel about?" he exclaimed in astonishment.

"Nothing that I know of, only Mr. Paget is rather quick to take offence," she said.

"You haven't quarrelled with him, have you?"

"Oh no; we shall be very good friends," she said indifferently.

"Why, shall be? Aren't you friends now?"

"I want to be, but Mr. Paget is rather silly, and—Oh well, if he hasn't told you, I don't think it's fair that I should," she said, and turned round waiting for the

others to catch them up, evidently with the idea of preventing further questions.

Dick jumped to the conclusion that Paget had plucked up courage to speak and was now sulking under an offer of sisterly friendship. That explained Paget's retirement from the world. Dick felt sure that Paget would try again, but the idea that he had been repulsed once gave him a feeling of satisfaction which he could not explain and felt to be unworthy.

They spent the last day of their holiday lounging on a grassy headland, heaved up out of the purple moor, which guarded the entrance to the cove. The sea, not yet subsided after a three days' gale, boomed and muttered in the caves beneath them, and the now windless air, though sunwarmed, had a touch of austerity from the waning season. A wistful odour came from the billowy bracken, already tinted with yellow, affecting the spirits with the sense of things passing. Nobody wanted to talk, and books were opened more as a pretext for silence than for their own sake. After their picnic meal Rose said that she would like to explore the unseen caves which pierced the headland. Warburton was lying on his back with his hat over his eyes, only a faint curl of blue smoke from his pipe showing that he was not asleep: his wife and Archdale were talking languidly about old times. Dick and Rose set off together to climb down the steep path to the shore below. Both were silent and ill at ease. He was thinking that he ought to say something graceful in recognition of the charm she had given to his holiday. The difficulty of saying just the right thing kept him preoccupied, and his unwonted em-

barrassment reacted upon her, so that when he held out his hand to take the book which she had absent-mindedly brought with her, she avoided the touch of his fingers and lowered her eyes, with a slight change of colour. Each was trying to think of something to talk about that would not arouse associations. Halfway down the rugged path a furze-bush covered with a curious growth that looked like shining copper wire attracted Dick's attention.

"What is it?" he asked, and she told him the name "Dodder." He laughed at the quaint sound, and looked at the beautiful parasite more nearly. Then he drew his head away with a shiver.

"I say, how horrible," he said, "the beast is strangling the furze-bush. Who would think that such a beautiful thing could be so malignant?"

With a gesture of disgust he tore away the threads, showing the furze tops, lank and wasted, closely studded with the tiny evil flowers of the dodder. Across the bush their eyes met, and each knew that the other was thinking about Evelyn Palliser. The recognition made them self-conscious, and they continued their descent in silence, half wishing that they had not left their companions.

Down below the drained out sea had left the boulders wet and slippery, so that Rose was forced to accept Dick's help in climbing from one place to another on their way to the caves, which yawned before them in the shadow of the cliff. As if she were aware that he had read her thoughts, the girl's manner was now cold and apologetic. They touched hands with averted eyes and made spasmodic efforts

to talk about irrelevant subjects. The place itself, out of the sun, was depressing. They were as if intruding upon the secret places of Nature, the ruins of an older world, wisely hidden by the merciful sea; they had discovered the roots of the land. The bases of the rocks laid bare by the ebb, now already on the turn, were stained and discoloured as if by some horrible disease; there were great gouts of crimson, splashes of crude yellow and livid green; the little pools of water left by the tide looked like pools of blood. The air under the overhanging cliff was damp and heavy; the smell of the ooze overpowering.

The caves were shallow and soon explored, but though uneasy in this place and out of tune with each other, both Rose and Dick felt reluctant to return to their companions. A long spur of rock thrusting out into the sea immediately below the headland appealed to them both at the same moment. Out there were at least sunlight and movement.

They made their way out along the natural causeway, which in two or three places was gashed across as if with a knife; the rusty tide-mark in the narrow channels showing that at high water the spur became a chain of isolated peaks. Dick made a mental note that he must keep an eye on the tide to ensure their safe return. On either hand the sea, moving in a heavy ground-swell, struck the granite with a resounding thud and slap: here and there a bright column of iridescent foam spurted high up into the air. Out in the sunlight, and warmed with the effort of scrambling and leaping from one foothold

to another, their spirits rose, and by the time they reached the extremity of the point they were talking and laughing without constraint. They sat down in a comfortable place with their backs leaning against the rock.

As if encouraged by the heave and swing of the water, Dick spoke with more warmth than usual when he said—

"I shall never forget this holiday: I'm tremendously grateful to you and your father for suggesting it. These three weeks have been a splendid time for me: I feel better in every way."

Her eyes, withdrawn from the sea, looked into his with a startled expression.

"I expect you were very near breaking down," she said, nervously catching at the first thing that came into her mind.

He laughed awkwardly, saying—

"You talk as if I were a complicated sort of machine."

"There is such a thing as being afraid to stop going," she said, and immediately regretted the words. It seemed to be so difficult to talk to him without stirring up the wrong associations. Though indeed she did not want to talk now. Sitting together with him in this place, so removed from the land and the past, in a purer air, and isolated by that other world of the sea, gave her a delicate sense of intimacy beyond words. She knew that it was her last opportunity for being alone with him, and since they could not speak from heart to heart it was better that they said nothing. If only she

might have held his hand she would have wanted nothing more.

She had removed her hat before they started to descend the cliff, and her finely-poised head, more golden for its grey surroundings, took on a character of sanctity. Dick furtively watching her, remembered his first impression that she ought to have worn her hair in two thick ropes down her back, and he now understood the reason: she was like a picture by Fra Angelico. From her attitude as she sat with her hands clasped about her knee looking seaward with deep serene eyes she might have been praying.

To him, without her fine uplifting, the sense of inferiority under her silence presently grew intolerable, and he took out of his pocket the book she had been carrying and idly turned over the leaves. A passage curiously apropos to her last remark and his impression of her sitting there, caught his eye.

"He, Cain-like from the calm eyes of the Angels. . . . Beset with darkness, cowers; and like some hunted criminal torments his brain for fresh means of escape. . . . Fevers himself with plans, works harder and harder, And wanders far and farther from the goal."

He turned over the leaves, reading on with the child-like, pleased surprise of the illiterate but thoughtful man who sees his vague ideas put into definite language for the first time. Presently he tossed the book aside, and lay back with his hands clasped behind his head.

"Yes," he said argumentatively, "that's all right. 'And still the great World waits by the door as ever' —but I'm not sure that you don't get the feeling of the great World more intensely by only opening the door at intervals."

"I daresay," she admitted, "but the great thing is to arrange your life so that you can have those intervals when you like."

"Well, there's nothing to prevent that," he said. "So far as anybody can be, I am my own master."

She did not answer, and he was immediately aware that he was not his own master and that she knew it.

To be able to find peace of mind only in constant activity, or the numbness of exhaustion, was worlds away from perfect freedom. Thinking of that brought up a curious question. If Evelyn had married him how far could she have adapted herself to all the possible conditions of his life? As comrade in the artist's life of high-pressure and constant change she was well enough, but he could not imagine her sitting here alone with him by the sea. She seemed to require a luxurious setting; "ramparts of stone and gold" and the "flesh and skins of slaughtered beasts." Rose Archdale, on the contrary, was as much at home here as in London: she was a part of the "sweet secret of the open air." Unlike Evelyn, she was compatible with all that was best in his earlier life he sometimes regretted: she would not have been out of place in his mother's house. Of course, as he had recognised during his visit to Palliser, love could work wonders with a woman's nature; still—a queer feeling that he was seeking an excuse for infidelity to

the idea of Evelyn made him jump up, shake himself, and suggest that it was time they made their way back to the shore.

The tide had risen considerably during the last half-hour, and though the whole length of the causeway was still uncovered, now and again a wave larger than the rest poured through the transverse channels. Two they crossed without difficulty, but when they came to the last, which was deeper than the others and about three yards wide, they saw that their safe crossing depended on choosing the right moment. The waves came at irregular intervals, and as the weather-side of the causeway was hidden by a great rock there was no warning but by sound. Twice they started and drew back as a green sea thundered by. At last Dick thought he saw an opportunity. "Now!" he said; but just as they stepped down into the channel he heard the dull thump of a heavy sea against the side of the causeway. He caught Rose with one arm and flung himself against a projecting spur of rock, as a mass of water, waist-deep, came hurtling through the channel. For ten heart-beats they were in great and terrible danger; then it was all over, and taking hands they ran across and stood in safety on the farther side.

Still holding hands they looked into each other's faces. "I wouldn't have missed that for worlds!" she cried with a glad laugh, and in a flash he understood. He let go her hands and turned away, deeply agitated. There was nothing to be said, and in silence they picked their way to the shore. When they reached the foot of the cliff he noticed that she looked

white and faint, and he persuaded her to sit down for a few minutes before they began the ascent. They spoke in monosyllables without looking at each other. She was suffering agonies of shame, while he, with a miserable feeling of impotence, knew now that he could and would have loved her if it had not been for the other woman who did not love him, and whom he no longer wished to love.

To their great relief Archdale and the others hailed them with laughter. Seen from above, and in little, the incident had looked no more than a wetting. But when Mrs. Warburton caught sight of Rose's face her own eyes filled with tears, and if her brother could have known her opinion of his intelligence and discretion in bringing Feddon to Cornwall he would have wondered whether he ought to write any more novels.

CHAPTER XXIII

PALLISER'S idea that his wife would be glad of society during his absence was apparently without foundation, for callers at Great Marylebone Street were generally told by Margaret that her mistress was not at home. Archdale, perhaps over-quick to imagine trouble, fancied that the decent, motherly Scotswoman looked worried. She hesitated while closing the door and examined his face wistfully, as if she were wondering whether she dared take him into her confidence. After calling three times without success, Rose hinted to her father that she considered that she had done as much as could reasonably be expected of her. He eyed her anxiously, but finally decided not to put his fears about Mrs. Palliser into words. After all he was probably wrong. Corroboration of his fears, however, came from Draycote in a letter from Bertha Chaldecote to Rose. The Umneys, up in town for a week to give their children the educational advantages of Madame Tussaud's and the Zoo, had seen and spoken to Mrs. Palliser in a confectioner's shop in Oxford Street, where they had gone for buns and milk. Mrs. Palliser, Rose was to understand, seemed to prefer other refreshment. She had been effusively friendly, and for a very good reason: frankly, at

eleven o'clock in the morning she was—not quite herself. Even the children had noticed how ill she looked and how oddly she talked. Rose was not to say anything to anybody: it was quite too dreadful to be talked about.

For a whole day after reading Bertha's letter, behind her genuine distress, Rose was conscious of a little sneaking satisfaction. Her father's queer anxiety about Evelyn Palliser was now explained; but the recognition that she was not so sorry as she ought to have been prevented her from discussing the subject with him. Everything seemed to have happened just at the right moment. Passion which treachery had failed to kill could hardly survive the spectacle of a degrading vice made even more squalid by the petty associations of confectioners' shops. There was nothing of high tragedy about surreptitious glasses of port at eleven o'clock in the morning: they were merely disgusting.

Rose had seen very little of Feddon since their return from Cornwall. This she did not regret: she could not meet him now without shyness, and a sure instinct told her that his memory of their three weeks' association in the land of romance culminating in a high-pulsed moment of close contact when they had faced Death together, was better left undisturbed by newer impressions. She did not flatter herself that he had given any sign of caring for her, but somehow she felt happier though less composed: resignation was now thrilled with uncertainty. She believed him to be tiring of his bondage, and nothing could be more likely to quicken his desire for freedom

than this picture of Evelyn debased in such a peculiarly revolting way.

But the next morning Rose woke up feeling only self-contempt. She wrote a little sermon on malicious gossip to Bertha Chaldecote, and, as if to punish herself, in the afternoon she went round to Great Marylebone Street, deriving a special satisfaction from the fact that it was a chill and foggy day when she would have been much more comfortable at home. To her surprise, and also a little to her discomfiture, Margaret told her that Evelyn, though in bed with a cold, would like to see her. Rose recognised that she had not meant her penance to go beyond the intention, but Margaret's words as she followed her up the stone staircase put her in a more generous frame of mind.

"I wish you'd persuade my mistress to see a doctor, Miss Archdale," said the woman gravely. "Maybe it's just a cold, but I don't like the looks of her at all."

Evelyn seemed unaffectedly glad to see Rose, and her unnaturally bright eyes moistened as she pressed her hand in her own small, hot fingers. Sitting up in bed with her scarlet dressing-jacket open at the throat, her dusky hair coiled low, and her creamy skin delicately flushed, she looked very seductive Rose thought.

"Oh, I'm all right, only I've got such a frantic pain in my head," said Evelyn in answer to Rose's inquiries.

She moved restlessly, and shook up her pillows, coughing with the effort and putting her hand to

her side. Her quick movements and flushed face made her look absurdly small and childlike. Looking at her Rose could understand how the helplessness of women touches and holds men. The soft finery and luxury of the room contrasting oddly with Rose's knowledge of Palliser's austere habits, made her feel that this was the nest of a pet creature affectionately indulged. Not even a bonnet, she thought, would make Evelyn look like a wife. The prayer-table with its silver crucifix and numerous daintily-bound books of devotion struck Rose not as an affectation, but as if a child had collected and pathetically reverenced things that she did not in the least understand. That Palliser evidently tolerated his wife's artlessly religious tastes only proved again how happily they had lived together.

Catching Rose's brooding eyes upon her, Evelyn made an impulsive movement.

"You don't like me, Miss Archdale," she said. "I've known that for ever so long. Why is it? Is it because you think I'm a bad woman, or only the 'I do not like you Doctor Fell' feeling? Come, be honest." She laughed nervously and patted down the bedclothes. "Come, sit here," she said; "do you never let yourself go?"

Rose sat down rather stiffly on the edge of the bed. Evelyn eyed her up and down with an amused look and she coloured deeply.

"Well?" said Evelyn.

"I suppose I'm rather afraid of you," said Rose with a laugh.

"Me? Afraid of me? Good gracious! but why?"

"Well, you're uncanny. I like holding my own, and you have ways of getting round one."

"Then you think I'm trying to get round you now?"

"Oh no, Mrs. Palliser," said Rose frankly. "It's when you don't try."

Evelyn bit her lip and her eyes filled with tears.

"Let me call you Rose," she said. "I want to talk to you, and I can't talk to you across such an immense distance. We are two women together and I believe we can help one another. Ah, but you must trust me, dear!" she cried, catching sight of an involuntary narrowing of Rose's expression. "Do you think that after all I've suffered I shall tell any more lies? If you won't tell me why you dislike me I shall have to tell you. But first—you'll let me call you Rose, won't you?"

Rose nodded.

"And you must call me Evelyn."

"Very well," said Rose.

"Say 'Yes, Evelyn.'" Rose obeyed, and Evelyn kissed her impulsively.

"You see," she said, holding the girl's arm, "I want to talk to you about Dick Feddon."

Rose made a movement to free herself, but Evelyn would not let her go.

"It's not a bit of good, you cold, proud thing," she said. "I know how much you love him, and I want you to understand that it's my dearest wish to help you. You mustn't be stupid when you think about me and Dick Feddon. I did treat him badly, but not quite in the way that you and other people

suppose. Rose, if you can't or won't have the man that God or Fate, or whatever you like to call it, has sorted out for you, don't let anything, convenience or compassion or ambition or duty, lead you to marry anybody else. I know people will tell you differently; they'll tell you just as my parents told me, 'Oh, you'll get over it. Girls don't know their own minds. So long as you respect your husband you'll get to love him better than ever you loved the other man.' And they'll point out to you, just as they did to me, cases of people who have followed their impulses and come to smash nevertheless. 'There,' they'll say, 'that's the result of a love-match.' But don't you see how much better and cleaner it is to come to smash that way than to marry cold-bloodedly on a lie? I don't defend myself; I wasn't forced into marrying Mr. Alemere. But I'll put it to you bluntly. If I'd married Tony do you think I would have run away with Dick Feddon? My friendship with him, you see, was based on the lie that every married woman is necessarily settled, and that her heart's desire is satisfied. What my husband calls the morality of the game-laws. It was a blunder, of course, my running away, but it was nothing compared with the blunder and the sin I committed when I married Mr. Alemere."

"I don't see why you should tell me all this," said Rose colourlessly.

"That's because you're too proud to be honest with yourself. Why do you suppose that you dislike and distrust me? If we had met in a

world of women would you have disliked me? Or if I had run away with any other man but Dick Feddon you would have disapproved the action, but would you have disliked me—myself? You won't speak, you won't be frank, so I suppose I must continue to humiliate myself. I don't and never did love Dick Feddon the least little bit—not in that way; but if Tony had not come back I daresay I should have married him. You'll want to know if I'd forgotten Tony? No, I hadn't. I thought, as everybody else thought, that he was dead, but I see now that that ought not to have made any difference. Dead or alive there was no other man to whom I could give myself without becoming vile. I don't blame myself in the least for taking that chance. It was the only right thing I ever did in my life."

She was interrupted by a fit of coughing. Rose did not speak. "The real reason why you hate me is because, long before you were aware of it, you were in love with Dick Feddon. I didn't know and he didn't know, so you mustn't be too hard on us. I'm not holding him: I'm not that sort of woman—to want a man dangling after me to whom I can't give my love. There isn't a man on earth I think fit to tie my husband's shoe-laces."

She lay back on her pillows, quite exhausted with talking so much, and so rapidly. Rose noticed how ill she looked. Her cheeks were hollow and there were dark rings round her eyes, and the flesh of her delicate throat had fallen in showing the line of her fine-boned but squarely-fashioned lower jaw. In spite

of her distrust Rose felt an instinctive sympathy for the feverish, unhappy woman, and it was with a sense of controlling a warmer impulse that she advised Evelyn to call in a doctor.

Evelyn made a wry face. "Oh, I can't take beastly medicine," she said. "And doctors are such prigs. They ask you such a lot of questions, and make you leave off doing just the things you like. Margaret's always worrying me, and I believe defiance of Margaret has as much to do with it as anything. Don't you like chocolates? Hand me that box on top of the books. No, not that one, those have—stuff in them that you wouldn't like. Chocolates always make me think of Dick Feddon. He's a dear boy, but I wish he wouldn't go about with such a long face. Of course he'll get over it: he's young."

It was impossible to be seriously angry with a creature so light, Rose thought. She wondered whether Evelyn recognised the havoc she had made of Dick's life.

"Do you ever hear from Draycote?" asked Evelyn presently. Rose told her about Bertha Chaldecote's letters.

"What does she tell you about? Does she ever mention Mr. Alemere?"

Evelyn was immensely interested in the friendship Rose described between Mrs. Feddon and Alemere.

"How funny," she said, putting a chocolate into her mouth; "but not a bit unnatural. He'll do her a lot of good. Have you ever considered what a lot

depends on when people know each other? Mrs. Feddon and George Alemere." She repeated the names thoughtfully. "I believe they would have been what my husband calls quite successful. Her high principles, and his earthiness." She sighed. "Poor dear George, he wasn't a bad sort, but he was so heavy and literal. He's the sort of man, you know, who calls Piccadilly a street. And then his boots, and the way he ate, and his awful friends. . . . I believe he was very fond of me, and I'm afraid I treated him very badly. I hate hurting a man. Men are unreasonable, you know. They have such curious ideas about honour. Though, of course, one prefers the ones with notions of honour, though they're 'gey ill to live with.' The others are beasts. Didn't you say something about Mr. Sherring? Do you know, Rose, I was always afraid of that man: there's something unwholesome about him. Never trust a man who brags about his indifference to women. And then he's got a bad mouth."

"Aren't I tiring you?" asked Rose.

"Not a bit: I've been horribly bored since my husband went away, and you're the first Christian soul I've spoken to for weeks. Oh, Rose, what an unlucky creature I am! I wonder where my husband is now. Fancy living a whole year without him. You don't know what it is to find your heart's desire and then lose it. I can understand how the poor women felt whose husbands had to go to the war. How I have prayed this week! Of course," she said with sudden dignity, as if she feared Rose might misunderstand her, "I understood when we married

that he would have to take these journeys, but I didn't think that the separation would be so horribly soon."

When Rose got up to go, Evelyn held her hand in a tight grip and looked at her appealingly.

"You don't hate me, Rose, do you?" she said, "and you will come again soon?"

Rose stooped and kissed her. Evelyn flung her arms round her neck and burst out crying.

"Oh, I'm so utterly miserable," she said; "I've been trying to bluff, but it's no use."

She clung convulsively to the girl, her slender body shaken with sobs.

"Evelyn, you mustn't," said Rose, stroking her head.

"Ah, you don't know, you can't know how miserable I am," she cried passionately. "I'm ill, really ill, and horribly frightened. I'm afraid I'm going to die, and Tony is away and bad friends with me. It isn't death I'm afraid of: if I could only die in his arms I should be quite happy. You know why he went away? We didn't quarrel, and he didn't mean to be unkind: he does love me, Rose, as much as ever, but he found out that I'd lied to Dick Feddon, and he thought he ought to go away until we'd had time to forget. It was really to spare me that he went away; so that I shouldn't see that he was disappointed in me. He couldn't understand that whatever I did, I did for his sake. My God! as if there was a crime I wouldn't commit just to feel his kiss on my lips. I've been an awful beast since he went away. I've been living anyhow, and drinking

too much, but I found out something last week that made me pull up."

She drew Rose's head down against her half bared breast, and whispered in her ear—

"Do you know, Rose, I'm going to have a baby. It won't be for a long while yet, not until the spring. But don't you see how awful it is? Tony won't be here when it's born. If he were only here I should be almost mad with joy. I'm quite sure if I'd known before he started he couldn't have been cruel enough to go, however angry he was. I was a fool not to take care of myself. Now I'm ill, and I'm afraid I shan't live to see his child."

Rose tried to comfort her.

"Don't you think," she said, "that if my father wrote or wired to Mr. Palliser and told him that you were ill, he would come back?"

For a moment Evelyn's face brightened, but fell again. She felt under the pillow and pulled out a pocket-book.

"He's been gone forty-seven days," she said, "and Benares is the next place where a message would reach him, and he can't be there for at least ten days more. No; that's no use."

Rose held her in her arms until she was somewhat calmer, and then said—

"I'm going to call at Harley Street on my way home and send a doctor to see you. You must promise to do whatever he or Margaret tells you. Some time to-night I'll get my father to call and hear what the doctor says."

The feeling that she could be of practical use gave

Rose a tone of authority, and now that she had once confided in her Evelyn seemed humbly to look to her for guidance. Her manner of pretty impertinence was quite gone, and she answered Rose's questions, and promised to obey her with the pathetic readiness of a broken-spirited child.

CHAPTER XXIV

ARCHDALE met the doctor as he was leaving the Pallisers' flat. He was a young, short, impatient-looking man with a black moustache, which he was constantly twisting, fiercely-sad dark eyes, and the abrupt manner of one who could not afford to have any illusions about his fellow-creatures.

"Pneumonia," he said, "and probably a sharp attack. She's a bad subject, in a bad condition—just when she needs all her resources—her surroundings are of the worst, and her nerves are all jumpy from some mental trouble. I didn't like to ask the servant many questions: a woman, if she's loyal, always lies. I suppose I can talk to you?"

He went on to ask rapid questions about Evelyn's habits and history, nodding intelligently, and without any sign of surprise at Archdale's answers. From his gathering bitterness it was evident that he had formed his own opinion about Palliser.

"He described her rather well, too," said Archdale, absently picking up a notebook on his return home. "'The echo of a stronger personality.' He asked about friends and relations—what an odd idea that is about the importance of relations, by the way?—which makes me feel that he's rather despondent. As a matter of fact, Rose, there's only us."

"I'll go and nurse her," said Rose, quickly.

"Dear!" said Archdale, impulsively putting out his hand. "You are fine, Rose; I wouldn't have missed hearing you say that for a great deal. But it won't be necessary, I think. We've got a trained nurse for her, and things are quite comfortable for the night, anyhow."

Rose asked him if he intended to write to Palliser. Archdale shook his head.

"Dr. Garrod says it's no use worrying him. Everything will be over one way or the other before he could possibly hear now. Better leave him alone, he says."

In the morning Evelyn was worse. Dick Feddon was at the Archdales' when Margaret's message came. He abused Palliser bitterly, raving about the room with white face and hot eyes like a person demented.

"He's forfeited all consideration," he said; "he's deserted her out of wounded egotism, and this is the consequence."

"My dear Dick," protested Archdale, "people don't get pneumonia from lacerated feelings."

Whatever shy hopes Rose had built up went down like a house of cards before Dick's outburst. Perhaps the hardest thing of all to bear was his gratitude for her kindness to Evelyn. When she got up, saying she was going to Great Marylebone Street, he followed her to the door, and begged her to take messages from him.

"Tell her that I'm thinking about her, and that if there's anything I can do she is to let me know," he said, holding Rose's hands.

When Rose was gone, Archdale, who perhaps began to understand exactly in what way his daughter was generous, took him to task.

"Look here, Feddon," he said, "this isn't wise or kind. I don't want to hurt your feelings, but things being what they are I should say that you were the last person Mrs. Palliser would wish to be reminded about. You can't do her any good by abusing her husband."

"Damn her husband!" said Dick passionately. "He's put himself out of court. He listened to a beastly woman dragging his wife's name in the dirt. What regard can I have for such a husband?"

"That's not the point," said Archdale drily. "I'm not defending Palliser, but he happens to be the one person in the world that matters to her."

"There's always a better way which occurs when it's too late," he said sadly to Rose afterwards. "It was Mrs. Palliser we ought to have taken to Cornwall, not Feddon." And Rose, with a bitter sense of having let slip her secret in vain, most heartily agreed with him.

Rose found Evelyn in frankly a sick-room. A tall, white-faced nurse was in possession, a young woman with a beautiful though impassive profile, downcast eyes, and a trick of drawing-in her short upper lip as if to guard secrets. She looked up from one of Palliser's books with a measuring eye when Rose entered the room, as if to see whether she could be trusted in that place.

"Oh, all right," she said in a tone of relief, "you're

Miss Archdale? Dr. Garrod said you were to be let in at any time."

"How is she?" asked Rose.

The nurse shrugged her shoulders and went and leaned on the bottom rail of the bed.

"She's having a good sleep now: if we could only switch off her head the rest of her would worry through all right," she said, looking with real though curiously detached compassion at the small, quick-breathing figure in the bed. Rose was momentarily more interested in the nurse than the patient: that contained sympathy, the sinking of all personality in the struggle between life and death, seemed to her a very fine thing. "The great difficulty is Mrs. Palliser herself," continued the nurse. "Won't you wait a little while? She has spoken of you, and I think it would be a good thing if she found you here when she wakes. Don't excite her; and, I say, couldn't you lie about her husband? It's not having heard from him lately that seems to be worrying her. He's on his way to Burmah or Ceylon or somewhere, isn't he? Oh, Tibet: funny things, men. Well, your father's a friend of his; couldn't you say he's had a letter sending his love? You've no notion what a lot of good it might do. A man's everything to some women," she concluded, as out of a wide and tolerant experience of human nature. Rose was impressed by her grasp of the situation: she seemed in a few hours to have learned who everybody was and their relation to her patient.

Towards evening the doctor announced real danger. "Of course we're going to pull her through," he said

brusquely, in answer to Archdale's inquiry; "still, if there's anybody she wants to see or who wants to see her, now's the time. Presently her temperature will run up and she'll be off her head, and people are apt to grumble that they weren't told in time. Most unfortunate her husband being away."

Archdale kept up a pretence of believing that Evelyn would recover, but Rose had made up her mind. She was convinced that Evelyn was going to die, and perhaps it may be forgiven her if her chief concern was how Evelyn's death would affect Dick Feddon. She had the whimsical thought that if Evelyn had wished to keep her hold upon Feddon, she could not have played a more brilliant stroke than by dying just now. Death would set her rounded off in his imagination. In the grave, where the mean and debasing possibilities of life could not touch her, she would be a triumphant rival to any other woman. The living have no weapons against the dead.

But Rose would do her duty, and her instincts about other people may be put to her credit. Mrs. Feddon, she believed, would like to be warned that the woman of whom she thought evil was in peril of death. Alemere, too, though she hardly knew why, ought to be told. So she wrote to Mrs. Umney, knowing well that the news would reach the persons intended.

Alemere went to Mrs. Feddon with bloodshot eyes and his healthily red cheeks mottled and unshaven.

"This is how a man gets hurt," he said thickly. "I thought I was right at the time, but now I could cut my throat for every harsh word I ever said to her."

Mrs. Feddon, flattered that he should have instinctively gone to her for advice, tried to console him.

"You could not foresee this," she said; "and don't you think that remorse is generally a mistake?"

She was conscious that her words sounded acid and unsympathetic, but she could not shake off the wish to make him see exactly where he had acted wrongly with regard to his wife.

"I wonder whether Evie would see me," he said doggedly, with his eyes on the floor.

"May I say exactly what I feel?" she asked, after a moment's hesitation.

He nodded.

"Well then, if your wife"—even now she could not rid herself of her prejudice—"is seriously ill and there are possibilities that she won't recover, if you can say from the bottom of your heart that you forgive her any wrong that she did you, I think you ought to find some means of telling her, so that if she is truly penitent she can make her peace with God with that off her mind."

"But she's down," he said impatiently; "I don't want to bother her with what I think or feel. When the woman who lived with me bed and board for six years is lying ill and alone, and for anything I know starving, I can't stop to think about rights and wrongs. I want to shake hands with her, to make it up. She's made a mess of her life anyhow."

He wheeled round suddenly upon her.

"You know what they're saying?" he asked savagely. "They say that Palliser's left her—mind you, I'm not going to judge him," he said, raising his

hand; "and they say she's been seen drunk, Evie, *drunk* in the public street. Can you imagine what she's been through to come to that?" He flushed darkly, and continued with twitching lips, "I'd have you remember where she learned that habit, ma'am, and who set her the example. Forgiveness? It's I that want forgiveness, not she."

In spite of her dissatisfaction with his logic and her repugnance to the idea of a sleek reconciliation, glossing over their fault, between Alemere and the woman she still regarded as his wife, she wisely did not attempt to reason with him.

"From what I hear," she said, "your wife is in very good hands, and though she is seriously ill there is no immediate danger. I shall write to Miss Archdale and ask her to send me a telegram if there is any change for the worse. Won't that be the best thing to do?"

He consented to leave it at that and went heavily away. Mrs. Feddon was left wondering at the persistence of what her philosophy called the brute passions. She recognised that in spite of the pity she could not help feeling for Alemere, her conception of Evelyn's sin was not as against him at all but as against marriage; and that to her mind any cruelty he might have committed was trivial beside the fact of his having divorced her. There wasn't an ounce of reason in Alemere's remorse, she thought, but at the same time there was no ready-made reason she could bring against it on the moment except the trite "The wages of sin is death," which somehow did not seem to fit the case.

"You must forgive the liberty I am taking," she wrote to Rose Archdale, "but I have heard so much of you from Bertie Chaldecote that I feel I know you quite well. I am very grieved to hear from Mrs. Umney that Mrs. Alemere is dangerously ill. I need only remind you that her leaving her husband was the cause of a great sorrow to me. As you will understand I cannot hold any personal communication with her, but I shall be very grateful if you will find some way, which I leave entirely to your discretion, to make known to her that I have put aside any feeling of personal bitterness I had towards her. I shall be most anxious to hear how she gets on: will you please telegraph to me any change for the worse?"

It was a difficult letter to write, and Mrs. Feddon was conscious that the effort to avoid any direct reference to her son, and to stifle the impulse, which her conscience told her was cowardly, to send a sympathetic message to the sick woman, made it absurdly priggish and formal. Alemere's unreasonable cry, "She's down," rang in her ears. But still she had the perversely ungenerous thought that Mrs. Palliser's illness might be a trick to disarm criticism. For herself, as for Rose Archdale, the important thing was how Mrs. Palliser's illness and possible death would affect Dick. Lately she had been possessed by the idea that Dick was only waiting for an excuse to come round. Dean Maidment had made the most of his interview with Dick at Bristol station: had hinted that husks were beginning to pall and that the calf might be selected for fattening. It was

only a sort of shyness on Dick's part, he asserted, that kept him aloof.

His theory fitted in with her instinct. The Dean had spoken of Rose Archdale with demure approval, while regretting her parentage, watching the effect of his words upon Mrs. Feddon. He drew hazy parallels from plays, with the qualifying title "Christian," where love backed up spiritual attraction and Christian maidens hauled over their pagan lovers. Of course here the conditions were reversed, and almost more than the conversion of Sherring, he hinted, would be the triumph of hauling over Archdale's daughter. Both Mrs. Feddon and the Dean drew a very sharp line between sacred and profane love, though it is a little doubtful where they would have placed sensual though perfectly law-abiding passions like Alemere's, for instance. Probably their ideas on the subject were illustrated by a certain picture where the characteristics of the sacred passion seem to be children and feathers, of the profane, grapes and roses. The Pallisers' marriage was undoubtedly profane, though there was difficulty in reconciling grapes and roses with the Registrar's office.

Altogether Mrs. Palliser's illness gave Mrs. Feddon a great deal to think about. Only that morning Sherring had asked her for a definite answer. She pleaded for three days' consideration, why she did not know, though she recognised now that it was because her answer depended upon Dick's future behaviour. The future seemed suddenly charged with possibilities which Mrs. Palliser's illness brought into sharper forms. Mrs. Palliser's death, she thought,

might make all the difference to Dick. Finally, Mrs. Feddon felt that she could not dance on what might be her enemy's deathbed, and so Sherring was indefinitely postponed.

Sherring himself roundly cursed Mrs. Palliser and Dick and everybody. He had begun to feel quite sure of Mrs. Feddon and impatient of her many scruples and subtleties, which she, poor woman, so lovingly developed and presented to him for solution. Several things conspired to make him wish to bring matters to a head. His system of material comfort had lately been rudely deranged. His old housekeeper, sensitively alive to his wants and habits, had retired from age and blindness, and he was left to the care of two maids, one of them still unhandy, though, indeed, selected and partly trained by Mrs. Feddon. That, of course, was promising: the girl, slim, shy and country bred, though with a curious delicacy of feature and complexion, might be looked upon as a forerunner. Sherring had his economies, and there was no sense in a marrying man engaging a housekeeper. It will be seen, then, that for other persons in Draycote besides Alemere a great deal hung on the turn of Mrs. Palliser's illness.

CHAPTER XXV

THE crisis was over and Evelyn was gradually sinking. The fever seemed to have burned out some element in her nature and left her in body and mind like a little child. She was not unhappy: Palliser was still her constant thought, but she spoke of him now with distant reverence. Her thin, piping voice, as if symbolical of a passion from which all earthiness was removed, strangely suited the cool quiet of the room stripped of its pretty finery. She was a little worried about her soul, and for some time could not make up her mind whether she might receive the Blessed Sacrament. She wanted to Communicate, but was not sure whether it would not be disloyal to her husband to do so; because, as she said, "he doesn't believe in it, you know." Finally she decided that she would, but that Palliser had better not be told: that one white deception, she thought, might be forgiven her. Apparently she believed that she was going to get well, but she was in great fear of death, and out of Palliser's direct influence she did not seem to be quite confident that her marriage with him was right. Heaven, she surmised, was a place theoretically barred to her unless she renounced him: she could not do that, of course, but the Sacrament he ignored would be a compromise. She

wanted to make things right all round. Rose, who listened to her confidences, felt the irony of the fact that now, in face of Death, she never spoke of Alemere, and seemed to have forgotten Dick Feddon's very existence.

Rose sent off her telegram to Mrs. Feddon as one might send a wireless message into the void, wondering what would be the response. The last few days had been an education for her. She was peculiarly impressed by the doctor and the nurse: allies in that strange struggle she witnessed for the first time in her life. She admired their disregard for themselves, their magnificent loyalty to their patient, a stranger, and to each other, as against all the world. Their curious detachment fascinated her: they seemed to keep their faculties in water-tight compartments so that at one moment they could laugh and talk flippantly, while the next, grimly silent, they braced themselves against some new counter-move of the Destroyer. Watching them Rose felt a fresh purpose coming into her own life. She began to ask the nurse questions, and she, keen proselytiser as most nurses are, talked to her with enthusiasm.

"If there were more girls like you in the profession, Miss Archdale," she said, "doctors would be happier men."

The answer to Rose's telegram was Alemere in person, shy and apologetic, and confusing Rose by his arrival, so that they stood looking at each other without speaking. Archdale coming into the room seemed to need no introduction or explanation. His mental vice made him interested in Alemere as the

remaining piece of a psychological puzzle. Alemere was not quite what he had predicted, because three years' contentment and sobriety had removed all traces of the hypothetical ogre. After his first shyness had worn off, Alemere talked a great deal about what, with deference to Palliser, might be allowed him if Evie recovered. He spoke of Palliser without bitterness, with a kind of puzzled respect, indeed, as of a man possessing strange power—the power to understand and to master Evie. A man who knew the knack of living happily with Evie and yet could leave her was above criticism. Alemere talked in undertones as if Evelyn were lying sick in that room. He was a little frightened and bewildered by London: his hat, which had been correct how many years ago Archdale smiled to think, was now grotesquely out of date. All the time he held on to and constantly apologised for a big bunch of roses. "I could not think of anything else to bring, and I know Evie likes roses," he said, looking up rather combatively as if he were claiming a point in her favour which might be disputed.

Rose went round to Great Marylebone Street to learn if Alemere might be received, and during her absence he grew confidential.

"Evie always liked flowers," he said, "though she didn't take much interest in growing them. That was a mistake I made at first: I used to show her how things were done, and I'm afraid I bored her. I suppose that's the way with women: you should only show them results, and keep out of sight the trouble you've taken. Women never seem to know

what things cost: I suppose they were never meant to. There are flowers in my hothouses that it has taken me six years to get; hybrids, you know. I have had as many as five labels at once in the same flower-pot." He laughed indulgently as at the remembered mischief of a child, "Evie used to mix the labels up when she came to get flowers for her dinner-table. I told her it was a silly thing to do, but it wasn't more silly than the way people mix up their lives, was it?"

Offered whisky, Alemere, not content with declining it, must explain why, in terms embarrassing to Archdale. He seemed to find a shamefaced relief in talking about the scene when he had struck his wife.

"But I've not touched alcohol for more than a year, now," he said, "thanks to Mrs. Feddon; and I feel the better for it. I don't want to preach," he added hastily, remembering that his host might not be an abstainer. "Every man knows what is best for himself. I'm fresher in the morning, and I don't lose my temper the way I did. Of course I always keep something in the house for my friends, just as you do, but Harry Laking swore off the same time that I did. It was Harry Laking that was partly the cause of the quarrel, you know, when Evie left me. That's one thing Evie will be glad to hear, that I've given up the drink."

Archdale felt some anxiety as to the result of Rose's embassy. He did not quite know what he should do if Evelyn refused or were not allowed to see Alemere. With a sort of shame that he could

still regard a dying woman as part of a psychological puzzle he predicted that she would not refuse. He felt by intuition that a reconciliation with Alemere would give her a feeling of moral security, and the reflection threw a curious sidelight on the ethical standard of the average woman. It struck Archdale as it had struck Rose how completely Feddon seemed to have faded from importance: even Alemere did not speak of him, though he talked reverently about his mother.

"More like a saint than a human being," he said, "and for all her high principles she can make a plain man understand what she means about right and wrong." He told Archdale of her getting news for him, and how he had come in answer to Rose's telegram. Archdale was half saddened, half amused by his daughter's new secretiveness: he believed that she had intended Alemere to come, and he thought he could understand why; she wanted, for whose benefit was doubtful, to insist upon the fact that Dick Feddon never had any place in Evelyn's life.

When Rose came back with the news that Alemere was expected she took her father aside.

"Mr. Feddon was there," she said, "and I told him what I have not and do not wish you to tell Mr. Alemere. She is not expected to live out the day."

"But is Feddon there now?" Archdale said anxiously.

"No; I sent him away," she replied: "I told him that he had no right there; that she had sent for Mr. Alemere."

Now on the point of seeing Evelyn, Alemere was

nervous and embarrassed. All his old fear of her, that fear of a simple clumsy man for a clever woman which had found final expression in a savage blow, returned. He glanced apologetically at his clothes, looking at his large hands to see whether they were clean: he was evidently not quite sure whether she would not laugh at his roses. When Rose, feeling what he wanted, said "Shall I come with you?" his look of relief was almost painful.

On the way he asked innumerable questions. How was Evie looking? Did she suffer much? Was Rose sure that she had everything she wanted, or could they get anything on the road?

"I've been thinking of a plan, Miss Archdale," he said. "If Evie pulls through, London won't be the best place for her, and as Mr. Palliser isn't here to take her away for a change I don't see how he could possibly object to my lending Evie my house for a few weeks. Harry Laking would put me up, and I feel sure the air would do her good . . . I wonder, now, whether your father could spare you, and whether you would be so kind——?"

Rose nearly choked over her answer. The possibility of Evelyn's recovery was so remote that she had no scruples in promising. The great thing seemed to be to cheer him up. At the sick-room door his oozing courage failed him altogether. Rose had been compelled to refuse to go in with him.

"I'm not sure," he said, "whether it wouldn't be best just to leave the flowers with my love."

But the nurse hearing their voices opened the door, and Rose gently pushed him within.

"I'm pretty tough," the nurse told her afterwards, "but this was about the most trying time I've ever had. He was a brick all through; though he was in a deadly funk at first; like a great schoolboy. It was as if it was the first time he had ever been in a girl's bedroom, and he came in with a sort of clumsy reverence with his eyes fixed on the floor as if he was afraid of seeing things that he oughtn't. I saw him make as if to wipe his boots on the mat, and there wasn't any mat there, and that confused him. 'Well, Evie,' he said, 'I've brought you a few roses.' He stood at a very respectful distance, looking like the best man at a country wedding, until she made him come nearer. She was most anxious not to let him see that she hadn't thought of sending for him. She must have known that she was going to die, and he knew the moment he set eyes on her, for I saw the shot look come into his face when he saw how she had changed, but each tried to bluff the other, and they talked like a pair of children about the things they were going to do when she got better. She tried hard not to seem kind to him, not to let him see that she thought of him as a sort of big brother. My word! That man Palliser must be a marvel. It was a little difficult, you know, to keep him out of it, because although he wasn't mentioned by name he was there all the time, like a sort of atmosphere, but she was amazingly tactful. You wouldn't have guessed that Alemere cared for her: he held himself in so well. He began to talk about the improvements he had made at his place, and then stopped suddenly because he thought she might be hurt, hearing how much

better off he was without her. It was all rather ghastly, you know, and they would keep dragging me into it. 'I'm a lot better to-day, nurse, aren't I?' and she reminded me three times about her medicine while he was in the room. She was so cruelly anxious to get well, but at the same time she didn't want him to see why she wanted to get well, if you can understand. What an awful pity she never had a child by him. They were rank misfits of course, but I've seen worse misfits made all right by a baby. She told him about having taken Communion in the morning, and it seemed to strike her all at once that he ought to have been there—as if it would have given her a better chance on the other side. Do you know, I don't think she was quite the right sort of woman to take the bit between her teeth: too timid and full of scruples. She and Palliser were a sort of brass and earthen-pot couple, I should say. I didn't quite understand where Mr. Feddon came in, though I gathered that he was the cause of some row or other. She reminded him 'You never had anything against Dick Feddon, you know, and you must make it up.' He just nodded and said that was all right: he understood Dick and he would see that Dick understood him.

"I don't think he realised that the finish was so near. He kept on looking at his watch and saying that he ought to be going. I thought he might as well stop: he would help her through, anyhow, and that was the great thing. She only made one mistake. He was kneeling down by the bedside and she rested her hand on his head. I heard him stop breathing, and he shook all over like a frightened thoroughbred horse. She

quietly moved her hand and turned away her head and bit the pillow to keep from crying. Towards the end she got frightened and made him say prayers. In fact she died when he was praying. Until then I'd thought him simple and stupid, but when it was all over he just looked up at me and said 'Thank God.'—I say," she broke off with a queer grimace, "do you think I might have a cigarette in the kitchen?"

Dick Feddon called again when Alemere was just leaving. The two men met on the staircase, and it was from Alemere's face that Dick knew that Evelyn was dead. He turned round and was going away without speaking, but Alemere called him back. They went into the sitting-room and Alemere held out his hand.

The two men left the house together, and Rose went to the window to watch Dick going down the street. She had made up her mind about her own future. The nurse came into the room while she was standing there, and as she turned away from the window she put her arm round her.

"I suppose on the whole you've had more to bear than any of them," she said, "but you've got to set your teeth hard and think no evil."

Rose nodded against her shoulder.

"You see, dear," said the nurse, "you're the sort that always has to pay for the rest. Be a sportswoman and put some devil into the payment. When shall I speak to Miss Venables at the hospital?"

Archdale and his daughter and the two men she had not loved were the mourners at Evelyn's funeral. Among the flowers there was a white cross with a blood-red centre: only Rose knew that it came from

Mrs. Feddon. It was her way of saying that she was trying to understand.

After the funeral Rose spoke to her father. He did not make any objection to what she said, or ask any questions.

"A very good idea, Rose," he said hastily, as if to prevent the necessity for explanations. "I've often wondered exactly what would happen to you supposing I came to grief. Funny I never thought of nursing before: I believe you have very great talent for the work, and of course you can still make your headquarters here and spend your—days out, do they call them?—with me. I think the sooner you get to work the better."

CHAPTER XXVI

But the effect of Evelyn Alemere's death was not to end with her immediate acquaintances.

Geoffrey Sherring, unfortunate man, who never did what he liked or said what he felt unless policy approved it, was in a sad quandary. Mrs. Feddon at their last interview had asked his forbearance. She was not sure of her duty and would be glad of his prayers. "It is so hard," she said, "not only to do rightly but to feel rightly," and he understood her to mean that though she could in the canonical sense forgive her enemy she was not quite sure of her human charity towards a dying woman. Now that Mrs. Palliser was dead and buried, Sherring did not want to speak precipitately, but still less, supposing Mrs. Feddon to have solved her scruples, did he wish to seem laggard in love. Finally he decided that overboldness was the smaller risk. But Mrs. Feddon received him discouragingly. The truth was the poor woman was unable to make up her mind with Dick, as it were, hovering on the horizon. Less perceptive than Rose Archdale, she who had predicted that Evelyn's infidelity would leave him unaltered, supposed that her death would work a sudden miracle in his nature and make him amenable to other affections. She wanted to know how he would regard this question

of her second marriage. If Dick intended to remain obdurate, well and good; she had only herself to please: but it would be very terrible afterwards to learn that Dick on the point of crying "pax" had sheered off affronted by the prospect of a step-father. Her inner knowledge that this was the real reason for her hesitation and that she could not say so, that she was in fact not playing quite straight with Sherring, made her irritable and frosty in her manner towards him. He showed a want of delicacy, she hinted, and not the highest appreciation of herself. Wasn't she worth waiting for? was the question implied.

In spite of her cleverness Sherring saw Dick behind it all, and he went away sore and angry. His delicate spiritual intimacy with Mrs. Feddon had whetted other appetites; he had begun to see marriage in quite rosy colours, and at middle-age a great deal depends on being in the humour. Philosophers say that a man is never so ready to fling himself into the arms of any woman as when he has been rebuffed by one: it is certain that serious devotion to one woman makes all her less-favoured sisters seem more or less alike; one loses discrimination—as the eye after staring at the sun. From thinking about a woman Sherring was come to thinking about women.

Sherring vented his ill-temper in his home, which now missed the old-fashioned rigidity of his late housekeeper. It was Mrs. Feddon who had said that the good woman still thought of him as "Master Geoff" with disastrous effect upon the looks of his establishment. He ought to have pleasant faces about him, she said; and so she had chosen his new

maid, Lydia, as she might have chosen flowers for his table. Pleasant-faced Lydia undoubtedly was, though from the very first Sherring disliked her coming into the room where he was : she afflicted him with a curious embarrassment which he betrayed in an overbearing manner towards her. She had a trick of starting and blushing when spoken to ; he would come upon her unexpectedly in parts of the house where she had no apparent business.

A badly-trimmed lamp roused Sherring's moody temper to hysterical fury. Lydia suffered his rebuke in silence, with pale cheeks and downcast eyes. The fact that she had been sent to him by Mrs. Feddon made her peculiarly appropriate as a scapegoat: indeed, he almost persuaded himself that she was another just grievance against Mrs. Feddon. Lydia, he noticed in passing, had the prettiest ears, a skin of almost transparent delicacy and soft brown hair in little curls ; but her prettiness only affected him with an insane desire to browbeat her. He knew all the time that he was not bullying for love of bullying but because of the peculiar emotion, like pity, but which was not altogether pity, he derived from seeing her soft, young body shrink away from him. He liked to see her down-dropped lids and pale red lips trembling. The next morning the elder servant who had been with him for five or six years told him that Lydia wanted to leave. He sent for her and she came crying.

Mrs. Feddon, meanwhile, was in a state of tremulous expectancy. The postman had become a person of exaggerated importance for her, but still he brought

no letter from Dick. Alemere had returned from London bringing her just those scraps of news which gave point to her uncertainty. Dick was looking old and ill, he said, it was almost impossible to believe that three years had made all that difference in him. Obviously his professional position was assured: he was spoken of as a person of consequence in town.

"The thing I can't understand about him is his want of keenness," Alemere said. "He's working hard but he don't seem to get the pleasure out of it that a man ought. He seems to go to his work," Alemere continued, hesitating as if ashamed, but determined to be precise, "as I used to go to my houses after I'd had a row with Evie."

Alemere could not speak too enthusiastically of the Archdales. Archdale was a gentleman and Rose altogether angelic. Dick was lucky to have such friends: he used their house with an easy familiarity as if he was a member of the family. Mrs. Feddon was dying to ask a question, and presently Alemere felt his way to the answer, cautiously, not as if he were doubtful of the effect it would have upon Mrs. Feddon, but because it took him a long time to make up his mind and he would not speak until he had.

"I think Miss Archdale is very fond of Dick," he blurted out; and then, as if fearful he had committed himself too far, shied off into "She asked a great many questions about you and sent her love," which, Mrs. Feddon, knowing women, thought very promising.

"Did Dick speak about me?" she was driven to ask with suppressed eagerness.

"No," Alemere, punctiliously truthful, reluctantly

admitted; "but I could see that he wanted to hear news of you. Look here, Mrs. Feddon," he said, facing her with a defiant air, "if you wrote to Dick you'd have him down by the next train."

There it was at last, that point long hidden, so trivial and yet so vital, the very root of her difficulty; who should write first; who should say "Beaten." The admission for either of them struck backwards such a long way, to their very first argument indeed. If she wrote, she admitted herself in the wrong; and all that serene difference from her easier neighbours which made her Mrs. Feddon was a foolish affectation. She knew that she had learned lately that human life and questions of right and wrong were not so simple as she had preached, not to be settled by reference to any arbitrary code; she was more than ready to recognise the unreasonable pull of her own flesh and blood, but she was not yet prepared to dethrone herself. All the barriers were down but that last one of personal pride.

Facing this at last, and with Dick's continued silence, Mrs. Feddon hardened her heart. Then she heard from Bertha Chaldecote that Rose Archdale had entered St. Raphael's Hospital, as a probationer, and she instinctively knew that her lurking hope of a diversion, by which her difference with Dick might end in a "draw," must be abandoned.

She was wasting her time and humiliating herself to no purpose: it was quite clear that Dick waited for her to give in. With the recognition of this it struck her all at once that she had been hardly fair to Sherring. It was unreasonable of her to suppose

that he could understand her difficulty. He was evidently much more sensitive than he allowed people to know, and she had hurt him cruelly. Since their little tiff he had not been to see her, though he had knelt beside her at the altar rails that very morning as if to intimate that it was no unchristian malice which kept him aloof. In the reaction she suffered a remorse which she perhaps mistook for tenderness. Twice during the day she began a letter asking him to come and see her, but the premonition that he would come unasked that afternoon kept her from finishing it. She lingered over her tea-table, half amused that at her age she could be so fluttered, listened, went to the window, strummed on the piano, and behaved for all the world like a young girl expecting her first lover. Finally she decided on a concession truly regal. If Sherring were sulking she would not reason with him or try to excuse her share in the quarrel: she would win him out of his ill-humour by simply being herself. She ran lightly upstairs humming a tune to keep herself in courage. Standing before the glass, and breathing a little quickly, she studied her reflection closely and dispassionately. Her dark-blue eyes were bright and clear, her cheeks unwrinkled, and her teeth, momentarily exposed, flashed back at her, white, even and perfect. She had the figure of a girl of twenty-five, supple and rounded. Not many women of her age had such an armoury of bodily attractions. And after all, what was forty-four? Surely, for a man of nearly fifty it might be regarded as the prime of life in a woman.

She hesitated before her wardrobe, unable to decide what to wear. Mrs. Feddon never made the mistake of aiming at a youthful appearance: her dress always recognised the special charm of maturity. She looked at one gown after another: dusky brown, the grey-green of still water, lilac, lavender—there were many reticent colours to choose from. She had never consciously used her beauty before, but had always relied upon the powers of her mind to impress both men and women. Lately, however, though she was hardly aware of it, she had been half won over to a belief in the importance of physical charm. Anyhow, to-day she would prove to the worldlings that she could handle their own weapons: that although she had despised bodily attractions it was not because she did not possess them. She changed into a gown that was like dead leaves relieved with autumn mist, and made the most of her dark brown hair. She was a little pale from excitement, and with a laugh at her own folly she wished that she had some rouge on her dressing-table.

There was a pensive beauty about the day that seemed in keeping with her mood and appearance. The white road, still wet after yesterday's rain, reflected a late October sunset of buff and lavender. A touch of frost in the air brought out the fragrance of the fallen flakes of yellow from the poplars which even in so little wind moved and whispered. The Georgian houses, pillared and porticoed, of weathered Bath stone relieved by a thin tracery of crimson where more persistent leaves of Virginian creeper still clung to the walls, looked mellow and dignified,

and the far landscape was of the kind called "bosky": deep valleys filled with rounded clumps of trees bathed in blue mist. Late flowers burned in the gardens, and in the orchards apples hung, reddening the spaces where leaves had fallen. In the air was the smell of weed fires. Everything wore a look of fatigued sentimentality, very considered, and fitting the sophisticated romance of middle-age. The whole scene might have been the background to a *fête galante* of Watteau.

As Mrs. Feddon crossed the wide common her lips smiled rather mischievously. The something clandestine in her purpose pleased her: she would not err on the side of austerity to-day. She had decided on a liberty she had never taken before: she meant to go into Sherring's house without ringing the bell. When she reached the avenue of tall elms, their half-bared branches fan-like against the pale sky, she met Sherring's elder servant dressed for an evening out. That seemed a good omen: Sherring could be having no company this evening, and there would be one less of his immediate household to comment on her visit. Nevertheless she pushed open the tall iron gates with some apprehension. The short drive was made more important by heavy shrubs, so that one did not see how near was the house to the road. Mrs. Feddon hoped that Sherring would not be in the garden: she wished to come suddenly upon him within doors. When she reached the little conservatory in front of the house she noticed with relief that both doors were open. She stole through the broad, low, dark hall and pushed open the study door which stood ajar.

"You see I had to come to you," was what she meant to say, but a slight scuffle caught her ear before she could open her lips.

The maid Lydia stood up suddenly with Sherring's arm still about her waist. Then he got up from the arm-chair and the three stood looking at each other, still and silent, until the maid nervously giggled. There was tea on a little table before the newly-lighted fire, and now Lydia, as if involuntarily obeying the person who had initiated her into her duties, began to put the cups and saucers together. Then she took up the tray and carried it out of the room. As she passed Mrs. Feddon standing by the door, the elder woman saw on her white frightened face, with its quivering red lips and tear-wet grey eyes, a demurely-triumphant expression. No; Mrs. Feddon had no weapons to compete with young flesh and blood.

Sherring evidently expected Mrs. Feddon to speak. Having a little recovered from his confusion he braced himself; his thick neck seemed to shorten with defiance, and his white lips prepared to smile cynically. But Mrs. Feddon did not speak: she looked at him not even contemptuously; it was evident that she was not thinking about him at all.

When she reached home she went straight upstairs and tore off her dress. Movement seemed to be the great necessity for her. She walked energetically about the room, busying herself in a dozen little ways. Even when she had hung up her skirt she kept patting and smoothing it aimlessly. Without quite knowing what she did, she washed her hands and face, undid

her hair and brushed it out. Then she washed her hands and face again. She put up her hair, screwing it tightly to her head, and put on a dress she had not worn for some time, black and severely cut, and a white collar and cuffs. When at last she went downstairs she looked ten years older.

Afterwards she understood that she had wished to rid herself of the sense of having stooped to meet Lydia, for example, on her own ground. She had—what was the expression ?—played the game and been beaten. It struck her curiously that "shocked" did not quite express her feeling. She was hurt and humiliated, but at the same time she was also a little amused. After all, she had sent the girl to Sherring. She was less ashamed of Sherring than of herself. As if suddenly removed from herself and her own particular friends, including Dean Maidment, she could not deny that they were all very amusing. Also she wanted to compare notes, to share her amusement with someone. She sat down and wrote to Dick.

CHAPTER XXVII

Less than a year later Mrs. Feddon was able to write to Henry Archdale—

"Here is a piece of news which, as Dick would say, will be 'nuts' to you. You know of course that Dick's *St. Augustine* music is to be played at the Weirminster Festival in September. Yesterday Dean Maidment called upon me, and for the first time in his life, I should say, he was quite obviously embarrassed. We talked about Dick, of course, and after a little while I began to understand that the Dean was explaining Dick to me. I was puzzled and amused, but I did not quite see his object until he said plump out—

"'The Committee would feel very honoured if Dick would find time to come down and conduct his own work.'

"I was so startled that I said, 'In the Shire Hall?'

"'No,' he said, and though you may laugh, I've never admired him more than I did at that moment, 'in the Cathedral.'

"Strictly speaking, I ought not to have told you this, but since it may help you to see the really good qualities of a man whom I feel you can't help misunderstanding, I'll risk seeming disloyal to my side

and let it go. Of course Dick will consent, and—this, as you must admit, is a great concession for me to make—I am honestly sorry that he is no longer able to enjoy the feeling that he has 'scored off' people.

"Can you lend me Rose for at least part of her holidays? During the two days she gave me in April she allowed me to know her very well, and now I want to domesticate my might-have-beens. Don't you think that at our time of life one gets more happiness that way than by foolishly hoping for what at the bottom of one's heart one knows to be impossible? You hinted that you would like me to say whether I thought that what we both wish for will ever come to pass. Frankly, I do not. Even if Dick had not been through what he has, I feel sure that Rose would never have him now. I know that he cares for her as much as it is possible for him to care for any woman, and I believe that she will always love him, but always with her intelligence as well as with her heart. That, if you come to think about it, is a final obstacle. But if at any time Dick were utterly broken, outcast and unable to work, at the least sign that he needed her Rose would joyfully devote her life to him.

"I don't think you need feel any anxiety about a possible meeting in the future between Dick and Mr. Palliser. Whatever bitterness Dick may have felt towards him is now turned to compassion. So far as I can judge Dick is not unhappy. He seems to have won that independence of happiness or unhappiness which people are sure to mistake for

insensibility and egotism. And I suppose 'finding oneself' does imply a sort of selfishness. Probably George Alemere was right when he said that Dick has been 'hardened off.'

"*P.S.*—Please tell Rose that the Sherrings have taken a farm in Surrey. Lydia is a sensible little body, and I believe that she will make him very comfortable."

THE END

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